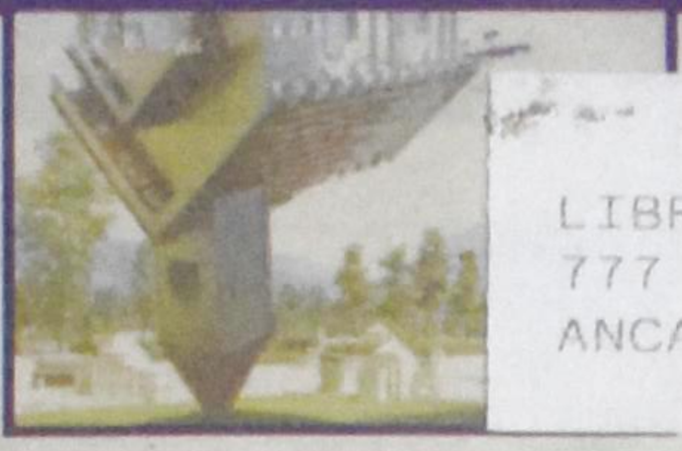

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Christ among us: The essence of compassion in Rogier Van der Weyden's Descent from the Cross

Rebekah Smick

The death of Christ on the cross is the central image in Christian art and thus the predominant image in Western art, which has been, until relatively recently, primarily Christian. If ordinary in this sense, Rogier Van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross* (c. 1425) is extraordinary, in my view, for the way it puts into visual form a theme that has recently emerged not just in the context of contemporary philosophy and ethics, but also into the purview of the general public. This theme is the idea of compassion, which, for philosophers like Martha Nussbaum, might considerably improve modern ethics if it were once more given a role to play in contemporary philosophy. For the author of the more popular and widely disseminated *Charter of Compassion* (2009), Karen Armstrong, compassion has now "become an urgent necessity" because of increasing divisiveness in the modern world. But in my view, long before Armstrong or Nussbaum wrote of modern divisiveness, Van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross* makes the essential character of compassion clear with a compelling economy and clarity.

Imago dei

Broadly speaking, Van der Weyden's *Descent* is an early Renaissance version of a kind of passion imagery that initially grew up in Europe in the eleventh century. Prior to this, Western images of the crucifixion had tended, generally under Byzantine influence, to show Christ as alive and open-eyed, fulfilling the role of triumphant Saviour. With changes to their Byzantine model and under the influence of later Franciscan spirituality, Western images of the passion began more and more to focus on the suffering and death of the incarnate Christ.

The religious motive behind this focus is amply revealed in Van der Weyden's painting in his figure of the Virgin Mary. Exactly mirroring the pose of Christ as his lifeless body is brought down from the cross, Mary's body is made to instantiate the response of any viewer confronted with an image of Christ's very human suffering. Mary's pose completely identifies her with his pain and death. This represents her compassion – her human capacity to feel the pain of another as if it were her own. In no uncertain terms, Van der Weyden's painting is meant to illustrate the late medieval doctrine of the Virgin's compassion through which Mary was thought to gain a role in Christ's act of salvation. Thus, via a very deft visual maneuver, Van der Weyden gives expression to what Karen Armstrong calls "the principled determination to put ourselves in the shoes of the other" when describing the essence of compassion.

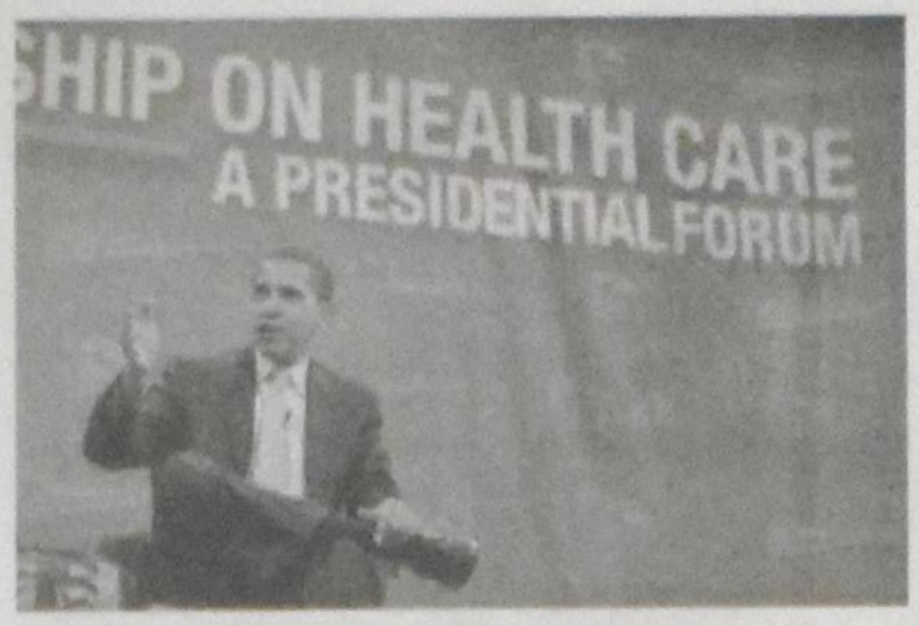
For Armstrong, compassion "lies at the heart of all religious and ethical systems," and it is what's needed to combat divisiveness in the new global community. In her view, we should harness our ability to imagine ourselves in the position of others as a means of creating community. For Van der Weyden,

See Compassion *p.2*

News

Highlight on Health care: Part III of III

Obama presses forward on US Health Care Reform



Mike Wevers

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Obama administration ushered in March like a lion in its push to proceed with US health care reform, despite failing to obtain bi-partisan support. President Obama has announced that he wants legislation to enact health reform passed in the House of Representatives by March 18 (carefully avoiding the omen-filled Ides of March). The Democrat leadership will not let the stinging loss of the Massachusetts senate seat slow their health reform plans. The "reconciliation" process they will use to get this done is based on the legislation being a filibuster-proof budget measure; it is about money.

The US continues to outspend all other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nations. In 2007, the US spent sixteen percent of its GDP on health while Canada spent ten percent, slightly higher than the nine percent average of all other OECD countries. But that comparison doesn't tell the whole story. For every billion dollars of GDP, Canada spends $100 million on health while the US spends $160 million, or sixty percent more. Because American GDP is far larger, this results in over $2 trillion in US health care spending, or over $7000 per capita – well over two times the $3000 average for OECD nations.

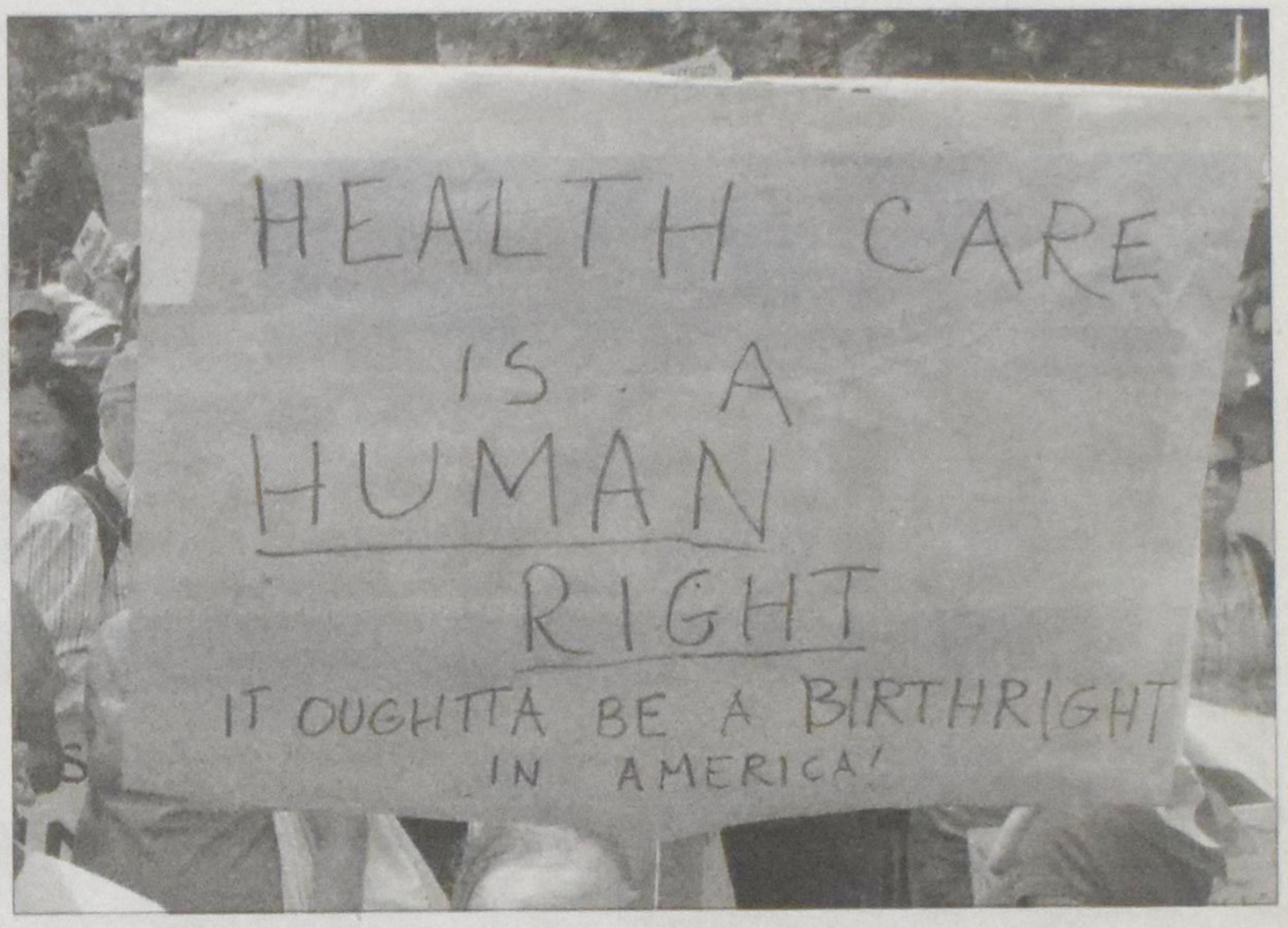
Health management

Despite this considerably greater health care spending, the US lags most industrialized nations in some key health indicators. The US ranks 23rd out of 29 OECD reporting nations in life expectancy at birth. The US based Center for Disease Control acknowledges that the US compares poorly to most industrialized nations in infant mortality rates, ranking 28th. Other factors, however, can affect these outcomes and are not directly related to health spending. For example, analysts often point to gun control in the US (or the lack of it), which results in higher mortality rates among young urban males than other countries.

Americans do enjoy considerably greater access to health services. For example, Canadians are somewhat concerned about the waiting list to get an MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scan to determine the extent of their injury or disease. That is not a worry for most Americans. While Canada has about seven MRI scanners per million people, the US has 26 MRIs per million, nearly four times as many (however, Canada does do more scans per machine in trying to do more with less in our public system). The data is similar for CT scans. To be fair, all this spending has helped the US outrank many countries in reducing certain disease morbidities; for example, it is number one in increasing breast cancer survival rates. And of course, there is increased access to many surgical procedures, as Premier Williams can attest for his heart valve repair. The Premier knew the procedure could be done in Canada (though not in Newfoundland and Labrador), but he chose to go to the US and write out a personal cheque to skip Canada's waiting list.

Not for profit, eh?

It is easy to get into a public vs. private debate on these discrepancies in health care spending and outcomes when comparing the US to Canada, but we need to be cautious in making sweeping generalizations. Private delivery and public access are not incompatible. A useful reminder is that almost every time Canadians step into their doctors' offices, they are entering private practice. Most doctors own their clinics, and part of the office visit fee includes a



portion for overhead and space costs. So the public pays for the medical service and the private space in which it is delivered. Similarly, the public purse is paying for an increasing amount of services delivered in private clinics for a wider variety of services beyond an office visit. Where this is closely monitored and enables increased access for Canadians, we should be no more concerned than when we go see our family physician for our check-up.

The problem in the US is that the vast number of private providers of health care, and the considerable number of HMOs (Health Maintenance Organizations), are all seeking to make a profit while delivering as many services as possible; this has brought overall health care spending to a tipping point. Those rising costs put health care out of reach for over 30 million Americans. Its government, led by the Obama administration, is now reacting with more purpose to rectify the problem.

Obama's bold remedy

What is truly disturbing from a Canadian point-of-view is that many of the uninsured are people with pre-existing conditions or illnesses which make them ineligible for private insurance, and subsequently without access to health care. It is hard to blame the private insurers who recognize that such patients would increase their risk considerably, which they would have to cover with reduced profit margins or increase premiums to others. I recall watching a documentary where a small used car business had to fire one of its employees because his wife had cancer and the company's health care provider threatened to cancel its policy if that employee remained. In a country that spends so much on health care, and where the best of care is available to most of the population, this is untenable.

The Obama administration plan will subsidize the uninsured Americans (the poorest and seniors are already entitled to publicly-funded health care through Medicare and Medicaid) to enable them to

buy private insurance and cover a great deal of the cost by eliminating inefficiencies in its government funded health care programs. Any additional cost will be covered through new taxes paid by high-income earners (over $200,000 income) in future years. It had considered a public option for the uninsured population, but that was dropped because it was unlikely to survive in Congress.

Obama's lion-like gambit entering March is not without considerable political risk. The plan appears to deliver on his health care reform promises, and it will get the issue out of the way before campaigning is underway in earnest for this November's mid-term elections. The gambit may fail, and if so, the Democrats will pay a steep electoral price this year. But from a social justice point of view, we should hope that his gambit succeeds, and that President Obama's March goes out like a lamb, with his health reform package securely in place.

Mike Wevers was Director of Physician Services for 5 years in Alberta Health and Wellness, responsible for negotiating and administering the government's Master Agreement with the Alberta Medical Association.

Compassion *continued*

Mary's compassion enacts the care for human suffering that underlies the historical Christ's own act of redemption.

Rebekah Smick is associate professor of philosophy of the arts and culture at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. She is working on a book about theology and the aesthetics of compassion.

News

Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman

Resurrection of the body in a bookstore

I walked into a Christian bookstore this week and thought about the resurrection of the body. I have always assumed that Roman Catholics own the market on spiritual trinkets; in the last few decades, however, Protestants are widening their range of spiritual commodities. They, too, will not hesitate to adorn themselves and their homes with "material Christianity" – as professor Colleen McDannell names it in her book of the same title.

Sure, already generations back it was common to mark one's house with unambiguous Christian symbols. Old wall plaques with religious proverbs dating back to the early 20th century are not hard to find. For example, this well-recognized inscription was selling in the 1930's already: "Christ is the head of this house, the unseen guest at every meal, the silent listener to every conversation." You may even have some similar saying gracing your kitchen counter.

Wall plaques are only a small part of the merchandise mix now. Saunter into a Christian "book" store (or go online) and you can purchase everything from "Witness Wear" T-shirts (with logos like: "Safe Sex? Wear a Wedding Ring!"), bumper stickers ("Forbidden Fruits Create Many Jams"), not to mention porcelain angels, Christian exercise videos, "Spread the Light" reading lamps with Jesus lamp shades, "Fly with the Lord" foam airplanes and "Smile, Jesus Loves You" harmonicas. These stores are cluttered with Bible bookmarks, Jesus puzzles, Noah's ark toys, WOW music CDs, spiritual Hallmark cards, "family" movie DVDs and enough choice of Christian mugs, pencils and necklaces to fit the tastes of an entire Christian school.

Oh yes. And books. Mostly fiction, children's paraphernalia and self-help (eg. *Step Family Success*). There are usually a few books in the apologetic camp but no section entitled "theology."

Don't worry if you're strapped for shopping time, because since 2003 Family Christian Stores™ are open on Sunday.

Jesus junk?

Some may be inclined to immediately label all this as cheap, kitschy "Jesus junk" – mass-produced, over-priced, inauthentic Christian trappings. We can certainly question how competition, fashion and profit-making are shaping Christian piety. It's a multi-billion dollar industry in North America, and not a few stores take in more than a million dollars of sales in a year. Large corporate powers direct sales: for example, Bible publisher Zondervan is now owned by HarperCollins (linked with mogul Rupert Murdoch) and now has "expanded its market" by also publishing Anton LaVey's *Satanic Bible.* Have we baptized a corporate-run culture of thoughtless consumerism by stamping scripture verses on posters, porcelain and plastic?

It's hard to completely deny it. Still, I was thinking at this time about the resurrection of the body. Christianity is about heaven coming down to earth. Physical resurrection. That is to say, faith in a God-made-fleshy-material cannot categorically shun material culture, not even pop culture. Most people cannot live by abstraction alone. Our *stuff* embodies what we love.

Imagine these belongings as aids to remembering God in everyday life. Professor McDannell suggests these knick-knacks – as incarnations of genuine faith – move Christianity out of the church and into the market and the home. Faith becomes imprinted not just on the regal or formal Sunday-like things, but also on the mundane and even trivial. Christian stuff marks the whole of a believer's life.

Artistic Easter people

Evangelical Christians, including some Reformed Christians, want to tell the world who they are. Some do this primarily with their ideas, but others do this with visual, sensual symbols. This can sometimes be sappy or silly, or even ironic, like the cheesy bumper sticker, "God wants spiritual fruit, not religious nuts."

Not all "material Christianity" is created equal. We can be discerning without being cynical or elitist. It would be shamefully contradictory, for example, if landfill sites became strewn with discarded paraphernalia covered in Bible-verses. Young disciples of Jesus Christ need to develop a critical eye for creative, life-giving expressions of faith. Labor-intensive homemade material Christianity, I venture, might mark more aesthetically-minded Easter people.

I myself have never purchased breath-freshening "Testamints." In fact, I do not frequent this kind of Christian bookstore. A well-kept used-book store, preferably with a rich theology and religious studies section, is what attracts me. Searching for a recycled religious text hidden on a rickety shelf is my idea of treasure hunting. Such is among the material Christianity that marks our home.

Peter Schuurman lives in Guelph, Ontario where he parents his two children, Joseph and Petra. He is working towards his PhD and teaches World Religion at Redeemer.

Dutch government collapse:

Will other European troops now leave Afghanistan?

Robert Marquand (CSM)

THE HAGUE, The Netherlands – The collapse of the Dutch government in late February, largely over whether to keep Dutch troops in Afghanistan, threatens to undermine the NATO mission in the central Asian nation. And, it may signal tougher political climes ahead for other European leaders supporting a troop presence in Afghanistan.

The Dutch pullout, scheduled for August, comes at a time when NATO is undertaking a key offensive in Marjah and implementing a "hearts and minds" plan coordinated by the US administration.

The government – Mr. Balkenende's fourth – broke up after the liberals would not accept Dutch troops in Afghanistan beyond an August deadline. Now, the 2,000-strong Dutch contingent of troops will withdraw as scheduled from Afghanistan's Uruzgan region.

The Dutch collapse brings concern of a domino effect: Can European leaders, who have been out in front of their publics on Afghanistan, continue anteing up – or will this withdrawal further sap a flagging political will across Europe for the mission?

In response to President Obama's request for more troops from NATO nations, some 5,300 additional troops were committed by supporting governments, mostly from Europe, according to figures from the Jan. 28 London Conference.

But polls last fall showed 75 percent of Britons and 86 percent of Germans opposed the idea. Since then, polls in Europe show growing public support (a majority in most NATO countries) for withdrawal from Afghanistan.

One of the arguments made by supporters of a European role in the Afghan mission, unlike Iraq, is that it must be grudgingly supported as a test of the credibility of NATO and the unity of Western security in the face of terrorist threats from Al Qaeda. And most of the heroin sold in Europe comes from opium grown in Afghanistan.

Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende on the day his coalition government collapsed.

But analysts say the Dutch case underscores sentiments in Europe that 2011 should be the start of a withdrawal. "This won't have a major effect on what [Europeans] will do between now and 2011. But then 2011 is tomorrow. The only thing is to achieve something that will work for that period," says François Heisbourg of the Foundation for Strategic Research in Paris.

The collapse of the Dutch government also calls into question The Netherlands continued role in NATO. It has long been a consistent and reliable partner in NATO operations, but is now opting out, pending a new election in May.

The Dutch case reflects popular discontent in Europe. As Henning Riecke of the German Council on Foreign Relations stated, "I would say it is the mood of the day. Everyone is talking about withdrawal; no one is talking about trying to hold on."

Mr. Obama has said that the US would start to withdraw from Afghanistan by July of 2011. As Riecke says, "The Americans have started the race for the exit door. There is very little discussion about . . . the effect of our policies on the people of Afghanistan."

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Guest Editorial/Editorial

Thou shalt not steal?

Jules de Jager

Did you catch the telecast of "Oliver" on CTV during the Christmas holidays? With his famous line, "Please, sir, can I have some more?" young Oliver's plight is forever etched onto our collective memories. What a poor lad! How cruel of the orphanage master to deny him sustenance! Did you see what was on the banquet table for the patrons of the orphanage?

If you remember the movie, Oliver is rescued from the orphanage by loving relatives only to be lost again into the murky underworld of 19th Century London. Now it is Fagan, the master of the thievery, who takes him in. As Oliver learns the pick-pocket trade, we are tempted to sympathize with him and the better life he has with these lads. At least he is fed well and appreciated!

Gospel message?

Did you also catch the news story on December 22, 2009, out of York, England? Did you hear that an Anglican priest, Tim Jones, during his sermon on the Nativity, launched into a controversy when he advised his poor parishioners to shoplift? *Daily Mail* reporter, Katherine Brown quotes the priest as saying *"My advice, as a Christian priest, is to shoplift. I do not offer such advice because I think that stealing is a good thing, or because I think it is harmless, for it is neither. I would ask that they do not steal from small, family businesses, but from large national businesses, knowing that the costs are ultimately passed on to the rest of us in the form of higher prices. I would ask them not to take any more than they need, for any longer than they need."*

Father Jones goes on to say, *"Let my words not be misrepresented as a simplistic call for people to shoplift. The observation that shoplifting is the best option that some people are left with is a grim indictment of who we are. Rather, this is a call for our society no longer to treat its most vulnerable people with indifference and contempt."* Having served as a prison chaplain, Father Jones has seen society's worst. One would think that Father Jones' parish was but a few steps away from the attic home of Fagan, Oliver and the other pick-pockets!

Variety of opinions

Father Jones must have known his comments would be controversial to his parishioners. What is surprising is that this sermon touched off a tirade of responses not only within the Anglican Church but also across public opinion in England and around the world. Anglican response has been critical of his interpretation of the Eighth Commandment. The former Archbishop of Canterbury thought his Christmas message was misguided and foolish. The Archbishop of York quickly clarified that Father Jones' comments were not in accordance with the position of the Anglican Church.Canadian editorials and talk radio hosts expressed surprise that a Christian cleric would encourage shop-lifting. They defended the legal definition of theft; suggesting the problems that this sort of civil disobedience would cause in society. Lorne Gunter of the *National Post* identified a Marxist perspective in Jones' theology.

However, what was striking on the talk shows was the range of opinion that the callers contributed. Many agreed with the critical comments of the host and contributed more evidence and analysis why Reverend Jones was so clearly mistaken. One common critique centered on how shoplifting from large chain stores was just as damaging to the general public as was theft from local Mom & Pop stores. However, it did not take long for others to call in support of the priest. Some related stories of their own struggles with poverty and how they shoplifted to balance their meager family budgets. Others felt the poor were justified to take from the rich. Revealing indicators of the "public mind" these days!

Biblical truth

But what do the Scriptures say? Simply, stealing is a sin. In God's eyes, it does not matter whether you are a white-collar schemer, a downtown thug or a penniless single mom. It also does not matter if the one stolen from is a hard-nosed business competitor, a multi-national corporation, a sweet pensioner or the obnoxious family next door. God calls humanity to respect the property of others. Thieves are to repent of their sin, return the stolen goods and even add more value to the offended one as a demonstration of restitution. And so should end any commentary on the foolish sermon of the Reverend Tim Jones.

Except that … Scripture does say something about those who steal out of poverty. Re-read Proverbs 6:30 and notice the phrase, *"Men do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his hunger when he is starving.* Is this just an example of our Christian calling to love the sinner despite the sin? Or is it also pointing out our shortcomings when someone close to us is so desperate for basic necessities? In case you think that this is not true, visit a food bank or a homeless shelter this winter.

The Reverend Tim Jones may have actually accomplished his sermon intention by reminding the global Church of its obligations to those in dire straits among us. We pride ourselves in the social safety net that our governments have provided for the poor in our country. Perhaps we need to listen to those who really struggle in spite of the welfare system intended for them. Christian compassion and care needs to be provided for those "Olivers" who fall through the cracks of our society.

Julius de Jager is currently serving as the Principal of Cambridge Christian School. He has been in this position since 2006. He and his wife, JoAnne, live in Hamilton, Ontario. They have three children and four grandchildren.

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Canada

Scouring the land for cultural redeemers

Bert wrote this editorial while he was in South Africa with his wife, Alice, and Marc and Dora Stroobosscher, a team sent out by Worldwide Christian Schools.

Bert Witvoet

One of the main tasks we undertook as we gave workshops to leading educators in about nine Christian schools in the province of Limpopo was to awaken in them an awareness of the vibrant praise-charged creation, which we either take for granted or else don't hear. But we aimed for more. We wanted to inspire a passionate response to the garrulous creation – we were looking for teachers who want to shoulder the cultural mandate.

Whether we succeeded in that task depended partly on our ability to communicate, of course, but it also depended on the heart and mind of the receiver. The parable of the sower comes to mind. The success of the sower is at most 25 percent (a failure rate in educational circles), if each of the four responses to the gospel represents an equal number of people. But that is not likely. My experience with Christian education in Canada is that the percentage is lower, more like 10 percent.

I am not talking about the percentage of Christian school-teachers who are born again. I will assume that to be 100 per cent, until the opposite manifests itself (sounds like a doctrinal dispute in Reformed churches about the status of deceased infants born to believing parents, doesn't it?) No, I'm talking about cultural warriors in Christian schools. How many Christian schoolteachers really catch the vision of God's kingdom pressing itself upon each lesson, whether that be math or geography? How many awe-struck visionaries does the average Christian school have? How many livewires lighten up discussions in the staffroom when it comes to seeking outcomes for a thoroughly creation-oriented and kingdom-directed curriculum?

A second rebirth

How many will echo the response we got to our very first workshop on Friday, January 29, this year: "I was blind, but now I see!" The interesting thing is that the teacher who wrote this was a believer long before she met us. She faithfully went to church and prayed daily for the Lord to give her strength. Her place in heaven had been secured by the covenant love of her Saviour.

Still, she was blind, and she didn't know it. She needed another rebirth; hence, the exact date mentioned earlier, in case people would doubt the authenticity of her testimony. The blindness she was talking about was a cultural blindness. It often goes together with creational deafness. She was not hearing the bougainvillea bushes lining the country road on her way to school singing psalms, nor the crocodiles doing the same thing when they gobbled up 16 of farmer Joao Lombard's flock of white geese at the Albasini Dam, nor the Southern Cross holding watch in the southern night sky singing God's praise. Even though the whole earth is full of the glory of God (Isaiah 6:3) and the whole creation declares the glory of God (Psalm 19), she and her fellow teachers did not feel addressed by God through the things God had made. They missed the fact that weeds greeted them politely every morning (Flemish poet-priest Guido de Brès). They thought they were the only creatures able to speak. They didn't realize that God, although resting from his creational work, is still actively engaging the world they explore in their classrooms.

Better in Canada?

Which makes me wonder, "How many Christian teachers in Canada know and teach that God has a covenant with the day and with the night, so that day and night "come at their appointed time." (Jeremiah 33:20, 21) This covenant cannot be broken anymore than his covenant with Abraham can be broken. God also has a covenant with the way a human person grows from being a baby to a toddler, to a child, to a teenager, to an adolescent, to an adult. In one of my doctor's consultation rooms there is a milestone chart for new mothers that indicates when a baby should start turning around, start crawling, start walking. The timing is not exact because God's

News

What's **your** story?

Announcing the *Christian Courier* Short Story Contest!

I: Send in your original, short fiction (1000 to 3000 words) on any theme by June 15, 2010. First prize receives $100 and publication in a summer issue of *Christian Courier*. Second prize receives a year's subscription. All stories must be submitted electronically to *brett@christiancourier.ca*. Entries over the word limit will not be considered.

II: Our readers 7 to 14 years of age can participate in the category for youth. Send your short stories (under 1000 words) to Brett Dewing at *brett@christiancourier.ca* before June 15, 2010. The two best submissions will win a gift certificate to Toys'R'Us, valued at $50 (first place) and $25 (second place). All stories will be considered for publication in *CC*.

covenant faithfulness is individualized, but the pattern is clear. There is a certain order in human development that calls out for recognition and praise to the Creator of life.

We live in a lawful environment. Even sickness cannot escape God's order. When my brother-in-law was diagnosed with cancer, doctors could predict with a fair amount of accuracy how much longer he had to live. Even cancer has to reluctantly acknowledge the glory of God. Everything is subject to God's merciful rule.

Our cultural blindness refers to our inability to see the purposeful task God has given us as the crown of his creation. God calls us every day to respond to the chorus we hear around us. He wants us to shape, build, cultivate and develop his resource-filled creation. How many graduates of our Christian schools leave their outcome-based education system (to use the current jargon in ministry guidelines) with a deep sense of a Christ-honouring outcome: accepting their part in the centuries-old cultural mandate, passed on from generation to generation?

Eduational crisis

Here in South Africa the cultural mandate has taken a beating ever since Apartheid ruled that blacks should receive an inferior form of education (the Bantu Act) because they were considered not capable of achieving what whites can achieve. And the beating continues today now that a Marxist-democratised humanist system has replaced the previous system, placing all races at the mercy of the lowest common denominator. Every week you can find articles in the papers that decry the state of education here.

There's a critical shortage of teachers after the closing down of a hundred teachers colleges in the mid-1990s, a serious lack of government funding, lengthy gaps caused by striking teachers unions. "In many schools that had matriculation pass rates of 20 percent and below, absent teachers and principals, or clashes between them, have greatly contributed to poor performance," I read in one such article. Another points out that only 36 percent of Grade 3 learners function at the required literacy levels and that only 35 percent have the required numeracy skills. It's difficult to say whether Apartheid is to blame for this unwillingness to take up the cultural mandate in South Africa's public school system or whether it's time for South Africans to shake off their own cultural shackles. Today, one-third of all South Africans are referred to as "free-born"; that is, they were born after the day Nelson Mandela was freed from prison 20 years ago, a date celebrated and marked as the beginning of a Free South Africa.

Unexpected enthusiasm

But how free are South Africans? President Jacob Zuma is trying to fulfil the first part of the cultural mandate found in Genesis 1:28: "Be fruitful and multiply," but he is not interested in the second part: "Have dominion over all things" including his sexual desires. Next door, his counterpart, President Robert Maria Mugabe, is busy using Cain (not Maria) as his role model by murdering those whose sacrifices are more pleasing to God than his and by embracing an anti-cultural mandate – the destruction of agriculture and democracy.

Yet, it is in this dismal social climate that we are getting a more enthusiastic response from educators than we sometimes get from our Reformed colleagues in Canada, who may well suffer from over-exposure. We have come across statements similar to "I was blind, but now I see," in Canada, but they came from educators outside of the Reformed community. And we hear such statements from South Africans here as well as from Zimbabweans who have fled their country and can be found in large numbers among the educators we work with.

I will end this editorial with a statement from such a Zimbabwean refugee, who eagerly embraces the material we present. He reflected on a mirror exercise done by Dora Stroobosscher to illustrate that we were made in the image of God. She first held up a clean mirror (Creation) then a mirror full of dirt (Fall), then one in which a finger-cleaned cross offered a glimpse of the person looking into the mirror (Redemption). He wrote: "My image in the mirror, distorted, disfigured and tainted by sin, improved and redeemed by the cross, shows that Christ can redeem and restore us to the original plan [read cultural mandate] for which we were created." He *gets* it. It's all about being redeemed to take up the cultural mandate again.

A note to our readers:

People give money to occasional disaster relief projects because they see the desperate need for the necessaries of life by their neighbours. I should like to appeal to readers of *Christian Courier* to give dedicated money for the project of bringing news to our neighbours in a way that is sensitive to the up-and-coming Rule of Jesus Christ in this publication.

Old timers will remember the pioneering editorship of Dick Farenhorst (1959-76), the redoubtable Bert Witvoet (1982-99), the moving editorials of dying Harry der Nederlanden (2000-2008), and the other visionary persons who have given life energy and wisdom to forming a sense of communal christian orientation on the news for immigrants across this huge land mass of Canada.

And now, something special has happened: a new generation of talented leaders has come into place, with a gritty alertness to the problems pressing in upon all who want to follow Jesus Christ in their journalist reflection. The current editors are able and willing to carry on and reach out with the biblical (Kuyperian) Reformational perspective on world news and reflection which *Christian Courier* has always tried to provide.

The finances of *Christian Courier* need on-going, sustainable help. If you, like my wife and me, are inundated by "good causes" requesting money, and do not know how to make a selection for your tithe outside church support, let me recommend a small thing. Ask your Credit Union or bank to send $15 or $10 every month to *Christian Courier,* because people who donate to mainline charities and disasters will hardly ever send money to *Christian Courier*. (And you will receive a tax deductible receipt at the end of the year for $180 or $120.)

Then you will help carry on the tradition of redeeming a journalistic square inch in God's Kingdom work, and give our current *Christian Courier* editors and writers a genuine token of dedicated money that stretches beyond "Church" outreach with "the Kingdom of God" vision – a special gift of the biblical Reformational faith tradition.

Calvin and Ines Seerveld

P.S. If you do not have the resources to do this (because you are already giving money to the Institute for Christian Studies and Citizens for Public Justice and your local Christian Schools and Cardus and...), ask a friend who has more income than you, to do it for you.

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Canada needs US-style primaries for electoral reform

Both Brendan Kooy and Kathy Vandergrift suggest electoral reform to make parliament more democratic (Feb. 8). I support that, but the failure in recent years of the referendum on electoral reform in both Ontario and British Columbia make a change in voting system unthinkable for years to come. We need to pursue different avenues. In particular, we need to add to our existing voting system a US-like primary.

The US congressional system has less party discipline, Congressmen are law-makers, and congressional committees have teeth. In contrast, Canadian MPs are whipped into line, laws are made in the Prime Minister's Office, and parliamentary committees have all the power of a wet noodle.

Many aspects of the US system should not be copied, but primaries have potential to make representatives more accountable to voters and to give MPs a measure of independence from party control. Exactly what Canadian democracy needs!

Primaries ensure that in a general election a party's candidate is selected by voters and not by party. In a primary election voters select one candidate from among a party slate. The winner of the party slate will appear on the ballot in the general election as that party's candidate.

Our political institutions need decreased party discipline and increased loyalty between MPs and their voters. It will not come about by talk; it requires structural changes affecting the self-interest of MPs.

Electoral reform is impossible for twenty years or more. We do well to lobby for a primary to take the nomination of candidates away from political parties. Unlike Senate Reform, this does not require constitutional change and people can understand it.

We think we live in a democracy, and we do, but Canadian democracy is ever so primitive. We can do better!

Nick Loenen
Richmond, BC

Are Canadians living beyond their means?

In his article about our economy (Feb. 22), Mark Anielski asserts that our economy has a cancerous amount of debt. Although it may true that the average debt load of Canadian households and governments are worrisomely high, he commits the classical fallacy of overlooking that financial liabilities and financial assets are always the same.

When we read that each Canadian taxpayer owes so many thousand dollars because of public debt, we should not forget that it is mostly owed to other Canadians. This means that debt servicing in Canada is mainly like a transfer payment. It goes from one set of citizens, the taxpayers, to another set of citizens, the bondholders.

It's impossible for everybody in the world to live beyond his means. If somebody lives beyond his means, then somebody else has to live below his means. Canadians can collectively live beyond their means only by borrowing from foreigners. Since our net liabilities to the world are only 84.3 billion, we can hardly be accused of living far beyond our means. It may well be true that the majority of Canadian households live beyond their means, but their net borrowings are almost entirely offset by a minority of households that live below their means.

James Schipper
London, Ontario

Harper's commitment to maternal health ignites abortion debate

Jenna Craine

OTTAWA – In January, Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced that Canada will focus on maternal and child health in the developing world during the upcoming G8 summit. Canada will be using its role as president of the summit to improve the lives of women and children in desperate need. As he stated, "Far too many lives and unexplored futures have already been lost for want of relatively simple health-care solutions." He then called upon other members of the G8 to join Canada in championing for women and children in the third world.

Harper's decision was quickly challenged, however, when the Liberal Party urged Harper to include funding for abortion in his initiative. Michael Ignatieff declared that, "we want to make sure that women have access to all the contraceptive methods available . . . because we don't want to have women dying because of botched procedures." He further stated that a "full range of access to reproductive health services should be made available."

At this point, the Conservative plan does not include abortion. In his initial announcement, Harper stated the plan will focus on providing "clean water, inoculations and better nutrition, as well as the training of health workers to care for women and deliver babies." When questioned directly on whether the initiative would include abortion, International Cooperation Minister Bev Oda replied that it would not. "Canada is not currently going to be changing its approach to improving maternal and infant health," Oda told the Canadian Press. "The prime minister has been clear . . . that there's no intention on regenerating any debate on abortion."

National divide?

Pro-life leaders have praised the prime minister and censured the Liberals. As Jeff Gunnarson of Campaign Life Coalition said, "by insisting that abortion be pushed, the Liberal Leader is dividing Canadians on what was otherwise a matter of unanimous consent."

But the official opposition does not seem ready to let the matter drop. Dr. Keith Martin in Esquimalt – Juan de Fuca, a Liberal MP and medical doctor, sees it as an ideological issue. "Once again," he said in a press release, "the Conservative government is demonstrating their willingness to pursue an ideological approach to public

policy. Mr. Harper and members of his government may personally oppose abortion, but they do not have the right to deprive others from having this option in countries where abortion is legal."

While castigating Harper for not funding abortions for women in the third world, Martin also used his press release as an opportunity to praise "family planning" (which includes abortion) as a means of aiding poorer nations. "There is no more effective way to enable countries to improve their economy, reduce social costs, save lives, and indeed improve their environment than by enabling people to access a full spectrum of family planning options," he suggested.

Other experts in the medical field disagree, however, with the Liberal push for abortion-funding within Canada's G8 initiative. Dr. Donna Harrison, a diplomat for the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, points out that poorer nations lack the medical resources to properly treat women who suffer from abortion complications. She suggests that insisting for abortion in the developing world is "scientifically, medically and morally unacceptable" in that it "[diverts] resources from interventions proven to reduce maternal mortality."

Jenna Craine lives in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia with her husband, Patrick, and baby, Noah. She is currently putting her B.A. in English to good use, by reading, and re-reading, "The Very Hungry Caterpillar."

On movies and professional sports

Thank you for the latest issue of *Christian Courier* (Feb. 8). I always enjoy reading your publication. Today's issue, as usual, made me think.

We have as near as I can recall subscribed to you paper since 1966, when we received our first subscription as a wedding gift from the consistory of the Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Brampton.

Two articles in today's issue made wonder. I recall as a young man in the sixties hearing sermons on the evils of indulging in the "worldly pursuit of going to the cinema." Have the movies improved or has the CRC recognized its error in this matter? I also wonder whether a Christian can live the lifestyle of a professional athlete and still be on good terms with the CRC.

Bert Grasman
Fergus, Ontario

FROM THE LAB
Rudy Eikelboom

Animal rights II:
What I have learned from God's Word

The justification for animal research is a contentious matter in our society. It should also be a matter of concern among Christians, who argue that they are stewards of God's creation. In my use of God's creatures as a steward responsible to God, I am guided by a number of thoughts and texts from Genesis.

Just another animal?

As I discussed in part one of this discussion, researchers have found many biological and psychological similarities between humans and animals. I find in looking at Genesis that the biblical story of creation aligns humans and animals biologically. Humans and land animals were both made on the sixth day of creation (Genesis 1:24-31) which does nothing to support a special status for humanity. If we, as God's image bearers, are so biologically unique, perhaps we should have been given our own day, with a different division between the fifth and sixth days: fish, birds, and every kind of living creature on day five and then humans alone on day six. The division between fishes and birds on one hand and cattle, reptiles, and wild beasts (and humans) on the other makes no biological sense.

Clearly, despite many similarities, there are also significant differences between us and even our closest related species. For me, these differences are rooted in our varying responsibilities: Genesis 1:28 tells us that God made humans in his image to rule over the creation, a command that we have interpreted to mean that we are stewards of God's world. This position does not necessarily mean that we are biologically different from other species. Even when monarchs had real power within the British Empire, they still needed to sleep every night. In the same way, while the function of humans is different from that of a chimpanzee, we are still part of the animal kingdom.

To understand the implications of our different functions, consider the difference in responsibilities between a king and a carpenter. One difference is that kings lead people into battle to defend their nation and in so doing cause loss of human life; carpenters do not have that responsibility, that burden. The king's responsibilities are tempered by God's will and the need to act justly in protecting the nation. In the same way, I as a researcher have God-given responsibilities to work in a way that respects and fits within God's will. This work may include the responsibility – the burden – to use and eventually to kill animals.

What about the fall?

Genesis does suggest, however, that the fall caused a change in the relations between animals and humans. Before the fall, Adam and Eve were given seed-bearing plants as food (Genesis 1:29). After the fall, God clothed the first couple with animal skins (Genesis 3:21), and after the flood, animal flesh (without the blood) provided food for Noah and his family (Genesis 9:3-4). Before the fall, it appears that Adam and Eve were vegetarians and did not use animals for food or clothing. Only after the fall were humans permitted by God to use animals in these ways. Perhaps we can link using animals in research to eating meat: what is permitted now is different from what was permitted before the fall. I have commented in a previous column that because naming is a large part of what scientists do, we could call Adam the first scientist. I am quite sure that Adam did not fill out an animal ethics protocol, but this was also before the fall.

As Christians, we need to determine how we are to live as stewards of the creation in which God has placed us. Research may be one way that we are able to carry out our stewardly task. In terms of doing research, the end result may actually be the same (both my non-Christian colleague and I still do research with rats), but my motivation will be different.

Answer 1 in the Heidelberg Catechism starts by saying "I am not my own but belong…." I am God's child, but animals too belong to God and are also part of his plan. Thus, the same framework of rules and limitations that for Christians apply to human research should also apply to their animal research – in both cases we are working with God's creatures. As God's stewards we need to treat God's creation with respect, and this respect for animals must also run through my rat research.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca) is associate professor of psychology at Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario.

Flowers & Thistles
Curt Gesch

Winnowing on a winter's day

The sun shining, the snow glistening: the ski hill beckons, but the grain beckons harder. So I stay home and winnow.

I really don't have much traditional grain this year. The few scraggly bundles of wheat and barley that I grew in the garden have been turned into chicken'n'eggs long ago. I never cut the canola seed that I planted for the redpolls and other seed-iferous birds. It stood through the scarce snow with pods held high until a large invasion of redpolls discovered it. They had no mercy on the canola.

What I have left to winnow is flower and weed seed.

In the fall I harvested whole plants: cosmos, ornamental grass, lavatera, etc. I hung these in bundles in the old shed. Most of them were dumped into the chicken pen during the winter. I discovered, by the way, that chickens spurn lavatera seed.

Just recently I gathered together the bundles of dried stinging nettle that I had bundled and dried last summer. The chickens love the seeds and the dried leaves. None suffered sore throats, but they got lots of vitamins and iron from the nettles.

Gathering the chaff

Which brings me to winnowing. Last spring I received some seeds from a grain dealer. He no longer stocks this seed because there is no milling capacity in his area.

This "industrial" plant is similar to nettles in some ways. It grows tall and without fertilizer. Some people in Vancouver, apparently, grow a hallucinogenic cousin of my "industrial" plant in their closets under grow lights. I don't believe they have chickens, so I can't imagine what they do with those plants.

Anyway, I harvested my thoroughly legal, non-hallucinogenic hemp in the fall and brought the stalks into the old garage to finish drying.

Threshing was easy. I rubbed the seed heads over a little framed "grate" of rabbit wire. There was lots of chaff.

Then I got out the square fan and put it on a tub next to the wheelbarrow and dropped the unclean grain in the fan's path. After a few times through the system, the mostly cleaned seeds were ready to be stored, and the "chaff which the wind driveth away" was collected and fed to the chickens. (I wasn't so sure about burning the chaff with "unquenchable fire" but consumption-by-fowl seemed an equally fitting end for the chaff.)

Connected across ages and lands

It is quite satisfying to hand thresh and hand winnow. There are some good books about small-scale grain raising that encourage you to grow grains for human or animal food in gardens and small acreages. The best, in my opinion, is by Gene Logdson (appropriately called *Small-Scale Grain Growing*, Rodale Press, 1977).

The book that first piqued my interest, however, was not a book about agriculture but an old book on everyday life in Palestine. This book, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands,* by Fred H. Wight (Moody Press, first published in 1953, 20th printing in 1978), opened my eyes to much of the Old Testament, not by detailed theology, but by explaining how people lived: their homes, social customs, food, agricultural activities, and so on.

When I got to the section about growing grain, I thought, "Hey, I could do that," and my gardening changed.

I now encourage everyone with even a small space – even a metre square – to sow some barley, or oats, or wheat.

Tend it and watch it grow. Weed it by hand. Tie up the stalks if they are too floppy. Enjoy the changing colours. Cut it, bundle it, use it for centrepieces or for a display at Thanksgiving at home or church.

And thresh it. (I'll write more about threshing another time.) Winnow it.

Watch the chaff blow away. Teach a child Psalm 1 while you do so.

If you grow wheat, you may pick it, rub the grains in your hands and eat them in the sight of the scribes and Pharisees. You may parch the grain before eating, as did Abigail. Or, from your handsful of threshed and winnowed wheat you can grind flour in your blender, bake a small loaf, eat it, remember and believe.

Curt Gesch (curtgesch@hotmail.com) is a retired teacher who has a root cellar, a garden chalet, and a really old house in Quick, B.C.

Calvin prof calls slander trial delay 'miraculous'

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras (CRCNA) – A new trial date has been set for November in the case involving Kurt Ver Beek, a Calvin College sociology professor who recently appeared in a Honduran court to face charges of slander.

The three-judge panel moved the trial to November because Selvin Richard Swasey, owner of SETECH, the private security company that brought the slander charge, didn't appear in court. His attorney said he was out of the country. Ver Beek says he is hopeful the case will be dismissed before November.

He characterized the delay as "miraculous," not a word he uses lightly. He is grateful for the support that he and the Association for a More Just Society (ASJ), the human rights organization that he represented in court, have received. (ASJ is the acronym based on the group's Spanish-language name, Asociación para una Sociedad más Justa.) "I know that thousands of people read about the trial and hundreds took time to pray and send emails asking, not for the court to rule in our favor, but simply to rule justly," says Ver Beek.

ASJ is a 10-year-old, Christian non-governmental organization (NGO) in Honduras with 55 employees. In its short life it has made some powerful enemies because of its work of uncovering corruption, says Ver Beek. "We were nervous about going to trial, especially since even some people very close to us said we couldn't win," he admits.

Abram Huyser Honig, director of operations for ASJ, says he suspects SETECH took the court action as a way to harass the group. If so, the organization showed it was ready for trial, Honig says. "We had the stronger case and were not afraid to go to trial. They were not prepared and probably not even interested in going to trial."

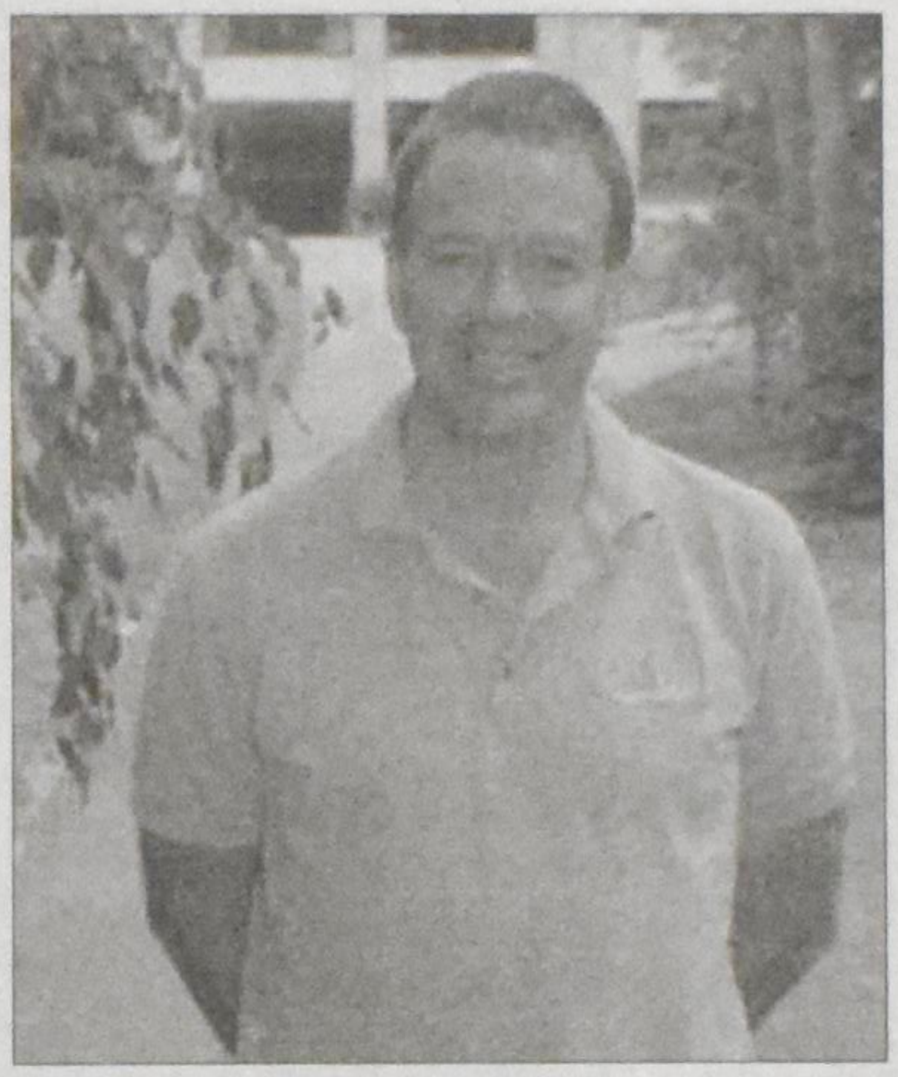
SETECH brought charges of slander before a lower court about three years ago. The charges stemmed from ASJ's investigation into the 2006 shooting death of Dionisio Diaz Garcia, a human rights lawyer who worked for ASJ. ASJ had implicated SETECH in the death. While the two people who actually assassinated Garcia were convicted, those who plotted and paid for this murder have yet to be brought to justice.

Ver Beek is a co-founder and board member of the Association for a More Just Society. Under Honduran law, a person, not an organization, must be put on trial – and so Ver Beek faces the charges in lieu of ASJ. Christian Reformed Church officials have sent a letter to government leaders in Honduras asking that Ver Beek receive a fair hearing before the judges.

Close to our hearts

"ASJ is an organization close to our hearts. CRWRC, one of our church's ministries, partners with ASJ to make psychological counseling and legal aid available to residents of poor communities in Tegucigalpa and Olancho," says the letter.

Huyser Honig notes that his hearing was attended by many supporters of ASJ, including representatives from CRWRC, the International Justice Mission, the World Bank, Danish Church Aid and other organizations working for justice.



Calvin sociology professor Kurt Ver Beek.

"On the sidewalk outside the court building, two dozen men, women and children who had benefitted from ASJ's work held a peaceful demonstration, holding up signs with slogans like 'Justice for ASJ,'" wrote Huyser Honig afterwards. "And all of us there for ASJ in the courtroom knew that there were an additional 300 or so people around the world who had sent emails to the [Honduran] Supreme Court on our behalf, and thousands who were praying – and that all of you were with us in spirit," writes Huyser Honig.

Rejoicing like King David

When the three judges assigned to the case learned of Swasey's absence, the trial date was moved. "We are rejoicing, saying to God, in the words of King David, 'You made my enemies turn their backs in flight' (2 Samuel 22:41). Please join us in thanking him," says Huyser Honig.

Ver Beek adds, "I believe that God is on the side of justice. And while I do not confess to understand how prayer works, I believe it does.... I also believe we have taken another good-size step toward creating a more just society here in Honduras."

ASJ provides legal services to impoverished people and carries out research and advocacy in areas such as land rights, labor rights, corruption and aid for victims of rape and sexual abuse.

In the U.S. the Association for a More Just Society (AJS) is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting justice in Honduras, including doing so by providing grants to ASJ and monitoring and overseeing their implementation.

Dutch Catholics angered by 'compromise'

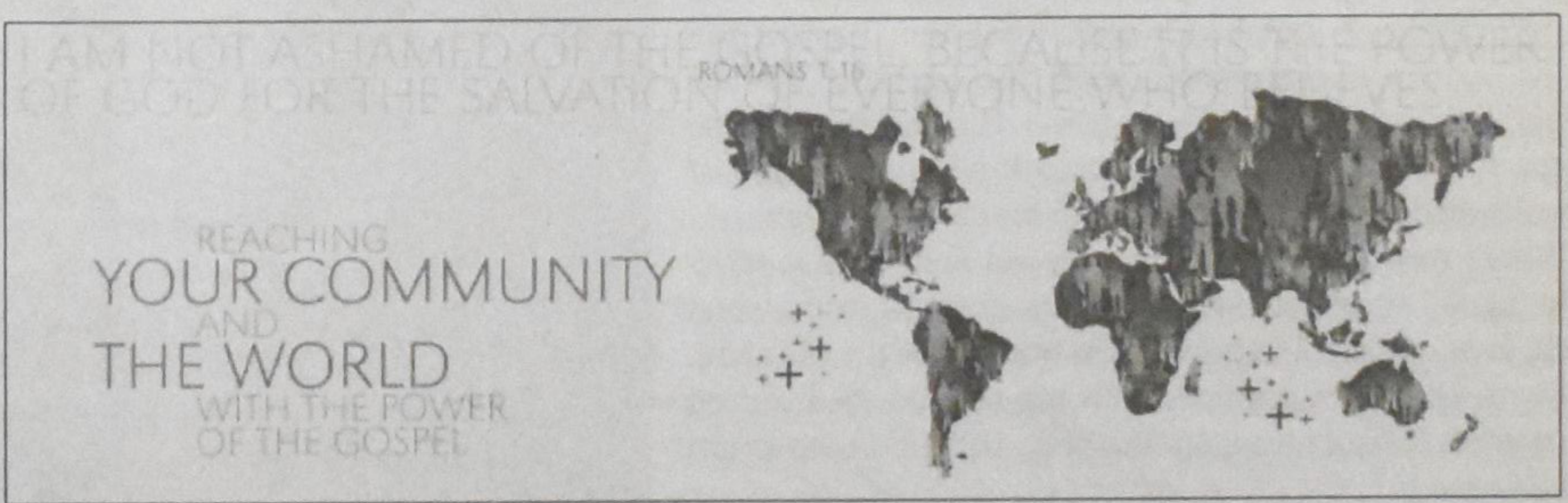
DEN BOSCH, The Netherlands (CatholicCulture.org) – Orthodox Dutch Catholics have organized a petition drive in support of a parish priest who refused to distribute Communion to homosexual activists. Organized by the magazine *Catholica*, the petition praised the pastor, Father Luc Buyen, but lamented that he "has been attacked by homosexuals and then left in the cold by his own church." The protest criticized Bishop Antonius Hurkmans of Den Bosch, who said that everyone should be admitted to Communion on the assumption that the faithful are responsible for examining their own consciences before doing so.

The bishop's call for a compromise came after a row over the refusal of Father Buyen to give communion to the openly homosexual carnival prince. The carnival prince character is a traditional part of Catholic pre-Lenten festivities in the Netherlands and elsewhere.

Bishop Hurkmans' compromise statement prompted homosexual activists to lift their call for further demonstrations at the parish. On February 28 scores of protestors – some wearing fright wigs – had disrupted a service at the St. Jan church in Den Bosch, which prompted the cancellation of the communion celebration in the service.

Christian Reformed Home and World Missions promote joint Easter-Pentecost project

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (CRCNA) – Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions are collaborating on a special campaign for churches that runs from Easter Sunday, April 4, until Pentecost Sunday, May 23. The two agencies have come together to shine a spotlight on how God is changing lives with the power of the Gospel in individual communities and around the world.



The project will be called "Reaching Your Community and the World with the Power of the Gospel." It is based on Romans 1:16: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." Campaign resources will include a devotional and prayer guide, videos, posters and bulletin covers and inserts.

Home and World Missions church planters and missionaries have come together to provide a devotional for all of the Sundays from Easter through Pentecost. Also included are daily prayer requests from various ministries in North America and around the world. The devotional and prayer guide are available as a downloadable PDF, or by subscribing to receive a daily e-mail (see <www.crcna.org/powerofthegospel>).

Eight weeks, eight themes

The eight-week series of meditations and prayer requests is based on the following eight themes: Sharing the Good News; Gathering Believers; Planting Churches; Discipling New Believers; Uniting in Prayer; Raising Up Leaders; Impacting Society; and Changing His World: Spirit-Empowered Mission.

The campaign also includes bulletin announcements to be used in church bulletins and newsletters, special bulletin covers and inserts, a children's bulletin cover, a feature article in the April *Banner* (the CRC's monthly magazine), videos that share ministry stories, and two posters. In all of these resources, the text focuses on how God has used both agencies, and church members' support of them, to bring the message of salvation to people in North American and around the world.

Pakistan churches condemn lethal attack on World Vision centre

Anto Akkara

BANGALORE, India (ENI) – Churches in Pakistan have deplored the killing of six World Vision staff members as the international Christian humanitarian organization announced it has suspended its operations in the country.

Dean Owen of World Vision said after the attack, "All of World Vision's operations in the country have been suspended for the time being." He said World Vision had received "no threatening letters" before the killing.

Owen told Mission Network News, "There were somewhere between 15 and 20 individuals who broke into our compound. They shot up the staff and robbed the staff of jewellery, money, computers, and phones. World Vision typically loses one staff member a year to violence; never, ever in our 60-year history have we lost six in one day."

News agency reports said unidentified gunmen lined up the staff at a field hospital in the small town of Ogi in the Mansehra district on March 10 and shot them indiscriminately before detonating bombs that damaged the building housing the healthcare facilities for those affected by the earthquake that ravaged the area in 2005.

In addition to the deaths, eight staff members were injured.

"This kind of barbarous act is against the suffering humanity," the National Council of Churches in Pakistan said in a statement.

Following the devastating earthquake that resulted in the deaths of about 100 000 people in Pakistan, leaving its infrastructure shattered, World Vision had been operating relief centres in the North West Frontier Province, an area that is often troubled by violence.

"All the people who were killed belong to Islamic faith," said the national church council, a grouping of four traditional Protestant churches in the Muslim majority nation.

Victor Azariah, NCCP general secretary, says that the attack seemed to be linked to the "Taliban movement, which is against the American presence in any shape."

Rich Stearns, World Vision U.S. president, said in a statement that he mourns "the terrible loss to the World Vision family" with its six staff members killed "in a brutal and senseless attack".

He noted, "Our work in Pakistan is conducted by local citizens." While mourning the staff "who died as dedicated workers seeking to improve the lives of people affected by poverty and disasters", the statement reiterated that "we remain committed to helping children, families, and communities in this country".

Several international organizations operating in Pakistan's troubled border areas with Afghanistan have come under deadly attack, including suicide bomb blasts, in recent months from pro-Taliban groups in Pakistan.

Iraq:

2,000 Christians killed, 600,000 have fled nation since 2003

BAGHDAD, Iraq (CWN) – In the seven years since the Iraq War was launched, 2,000 Christians have been murdered and 600,000 have fled Iraq, according to Fides, the news agency of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

Forty-four percent of Iraqi refugees are Christians, and many of the 600,000 Christians who have remained in Iraq are internally displaced persons who have had to flee their homes.

"The life of Christians in this nation does not appear to be among the priorities," said Chaldean Catholic Auxiliary Bishop Shlemon Warduni on the eve of the March 7 parliamentary elections. "We are victims of fanaticism and general instability, which leaves a free hand to those who want to use violence to intimidate. The causes are many and varied, but the end seems clear: continually reduce the Christian presence in Iraq, marginalize it, and deprive it of any rights."

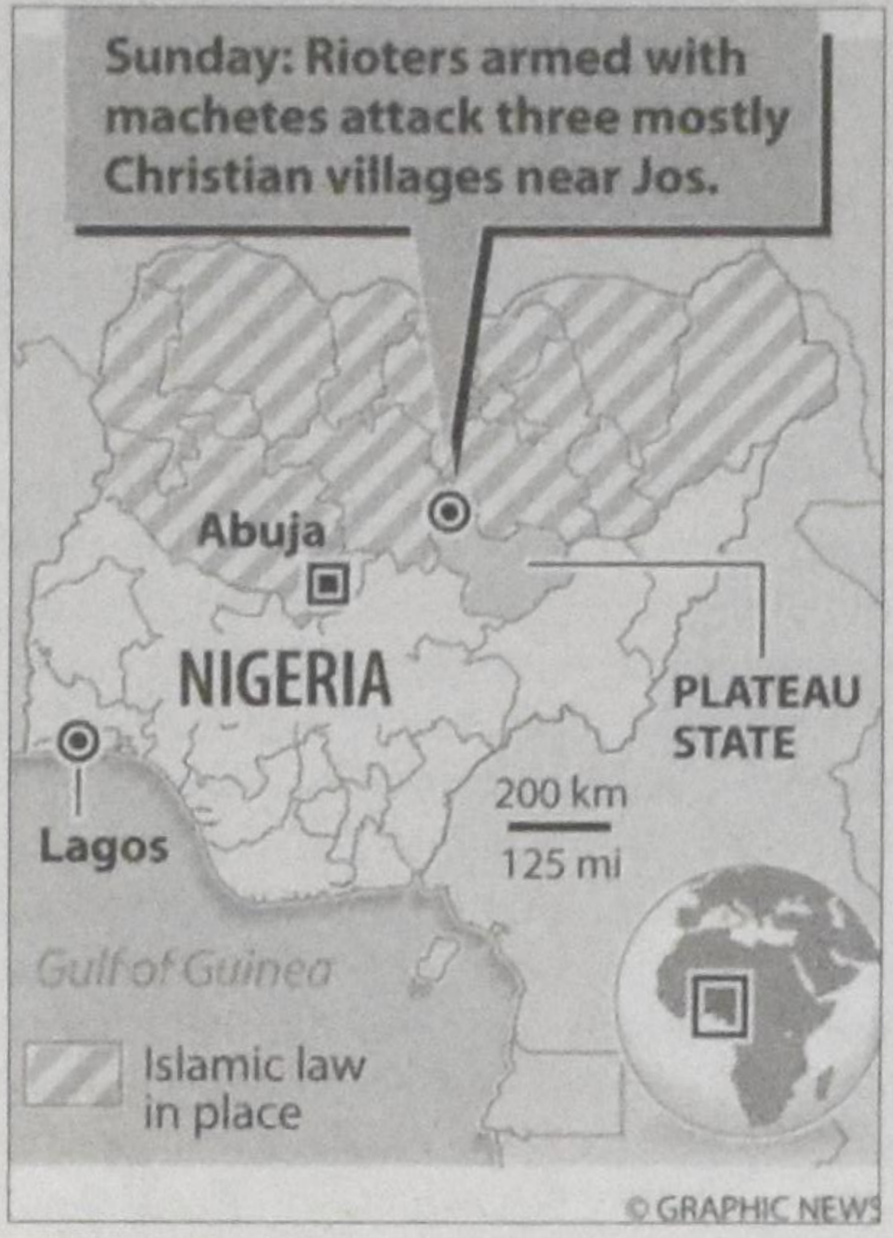
Between February 27 and March 1 of this year, 870 Christian families (some 4,400 people) left Mosul due to anti-Christian violence. In one month in 2008 (October) more than 12,000 Christians fled the same kind of violence in Mosul.

What is not widely known is that 40 per cent of Iraqi refugees abroad (1.6 million) are Christians. And 44 per cent of Iraqis who have applied for asylum in Syria are Christians. Asylum applications are growing in Jordan, Turkey and in Western countries (especially Sweden and Australia).

Iraq's total population is 27.5 million, 97 percent of whom are Muslim (65% Shiite, 35% Sunni). The total number of Christians in the country is now only about 600,000

Nigeria violence: Muslim-Christian clashes kill hundreds

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (CSM) – The central city of Jos is on high alert after Sunday's violence in Nigeria in which a late-night attack by herdsmen killed up to 500 people from nearby farming villages. The attack has been seen as a reprisal for attacks in January, in which about 300 herdsmen were killed by youths from the farming community.



The town of Jos is all too often a focal point for competition over the use of arable land in central and northern Nigeria, where climate change has dried up pasture lands and forced animal herders closer and closer to farming communities, where their herds can destroy crops.

Jos is also right on the de facto fault line separating Nigeria's mainly Muslim north from its mainly Christian south. The farming community in Jos is primarily Christian of the Berom ethnic group, while the herders are ethnic Fulanis who practice Islam.

"Land is central to the conflict in Jos," says Ugar Ukandi Odey, a Jos-based news reporter for the Nigerian newspaper *NEXT*. Mr. Odey has been covering the attacks and the tense aftermath. "The Beroms are the original people of Jos, and the Fulanis are nomads moving around with cattle who have settled in amongst the Berom people. But it becomes ethnic and religious, because there are Christians on one side, and the Fulanis are Muslims on the other side."

Goodluck Jonathan

Clash of cultures

Local disputes are common all along the cultural and ethnic dividing line between Nigeria's north and south. There are no signs that the crisis in Jos will have ripples beyond the immediate environs of Plateau State, where Jos is located, but Nigerian authorities aren't taking any chances. After all, Nigeria has just emerged from a national crisis of succession, in which a hospital-ridden northern Muslim president, Umaru YarAdua, has passed down power to a southern Christian, acting President Goodluck Jonathan, and where many northern politicians were signaling their willingness to put up a fight, at the polls at least, to pass the presidency to another northerner rather than to YarAdua's second-in-command.

Local officials have issued a dusk-to-dawn curfew, and Mr. Jonathan – holding a meeting with state officials and security commanders in the capital of Abuja – issued a statement, calling on Nigerians to remain calm.

"While it is too early to state categorically what is responsible for this renewed wave of violence, we want to inform Nigerians that the security services are on top of the situation," a spokesman said on behalf of Jonathan. "In the meantime, the acting president has placed all the security services in Plateau and neighboring states on red alert so as to stem any cross-border dimensions to this latest conflict. He has also directed that the security services undertake strategic initiatives to confront and defeat these roving bands of killers."

Working to keep violence from spreading

Jonathan and state officials will have to work fast to keep the violence from spreading. The attacks were brutal, with mobs of young men passing through two villages outside Jos and hacking to death anyone they caught – women, the elderly, and even toddlers – with machetes. Some firebrand Christian leaders from Jos are condemning the Army for moving too slowly, and calling the attack on their parishioners a jihad against Christians.

In Jos on Monday morning, youths had gathered to protest the killings, and police were arranged to prevent the protests from getting out of hand. Schoolchildren were being sent home early. Shopkeepers were locking up their stalls, or packing up their goods to take out of harm's way.

Violence in Jos killed some 326 people – most of them Fulani herders – just two months ago, and local reports suggest Sunday's attacks may have been reprisals. Christians of the Berom community view the Fulani herders as a threat to their livelihood as farmers, and also as a threat to their political hold over the local government in Jos, local experts say.

Jos, unfortunately, has a violent reputation. Rioting between Muslims and Christians killed more than 1,000 people in 2001, and another 700 in 2004.

Debate

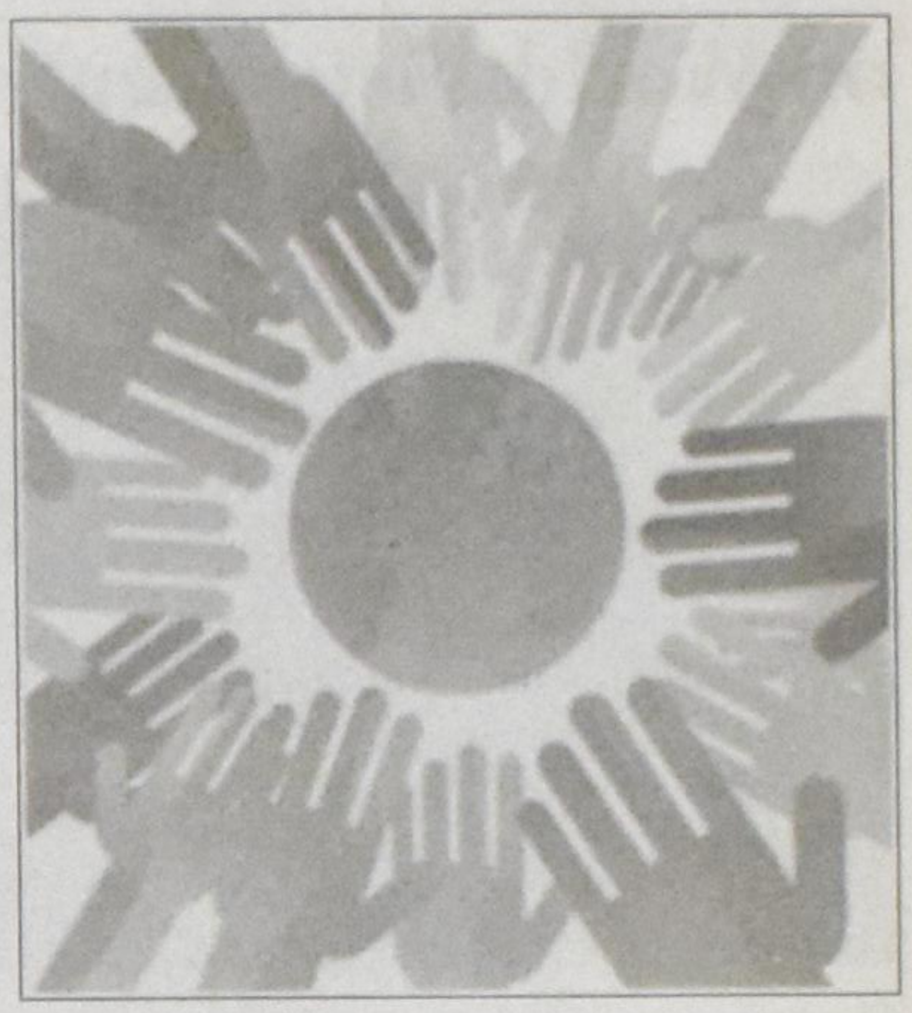
Belhar Confession debated

Part II:

Is the Belhar Confession more appropriately a confession than a testimony? Why or why not? And why is the Contemporary Testimony not upgraded to the status of a Confession?

In 1982, a Reformed church in Belhar, a suburb of Cape Town in South Africa, wrote a confession of faith that focused on social justice issues that arose around apartheid. Since then, the Belhar Confession has been accepted by some African and European Reformed churches as equal to the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt and the Heidelberg Catechism. In July, the Synod of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) accepted it as a fourth confession and the Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA) voted by 72 percent to propose the adoption of the Belhar Confession as a fourth standard of unity at Synod 2012.

Christian Courier asked Dr. John Bolt and Shiao Chong to respond to the Belhar's consideration by answering six questions posed by the editorial team in a series of six features over the next three months.



John Bolt

The second question has to do with the *status* of a confession such as the Belhar. To know whether we should honor it as a confession or a testimony is impossible without some elementary and boring work of definition. We need to consider the status, respectively, of a *creed*, a *confession*, and a *testimony*.

Some definitions

Creeds are those fundamental statements of basic belief that we share with all Christians. Thus the Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed are the possession of no one church family or denomination; they belong to all Christians and unite us with Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Lutherans, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists and Pentecostals. Creeds remind us that one of the attributes of the church is *catholicity.* Whenever we are tempted to become unduly sectarian in our mentality, it is important to stress this point. We are Christians *before* we are Reformed!

At the same time, it is also impossible for us to be generically Christian, unattached to any tradition, to any family of churches, to other Christians like us around the world. Yes, impossible, for even independent churches reflect particular families of churches (Baptist, Pentecostal) no matter how hard they deny it. Here, *confessions* play the role of distinguishing us from each other. We are not Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox; we are Protestant. But, as Protestants, we are not Lutheran nor Baptist, not Methodist nor Pentecostal. For that matter, we who are Reformed from the Continent of Europe are not Presbyterian either. Allegiance to the Westminster standards is the mark of difference between being a Presbyterian in North America and Reformed (CRC, RCA, Canadian Reformed, Protestant Reformed, Heritage Netherlands Reformed, etc.). It is here that the three standards of unity, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt *confessionally* identify these churches and their members. Confessions are total statements; they cover the entire body of a church's beliefs. They say, "This is who we are, what we believe, what we do!"

A *testimony* is of a different sort than either a creed or a confession. There is something of an *ad hoc* character to testimonies. Sometimes such a testimony will be quite comprehensive (as was the CRC's *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*), at other times it will focus on a specific issue: abortion, Christian education, war, racism, end-of-life issues and the like. Testimonies have weight; they should not be ignored or dismissed, but they are not binding doctrine on members or officebearers. Office bearers are not obligated to submit objections (*gravamina*) to items they disagree with. In other words, they do have a lower threshold of affirmation than confessions do.

An important message

So then, should the Belhar become a confession or a testimony in the CRC? I have many objections to the Belhar being adopted as a confession, some of which I indicated in my answer to the first question. Would I be happy with having it become a testimony? My answer will undoubtedly be quite unsatisfying to everyone, including, eventually, to myself: "I can live with it."

I know that is rather tepid, and as my family and friends will testify, quite uncharacteristic for me. So, here's why. The Belhar is an address to a real and serious problem in the human race (and in the Reformed Churches of South Africa) which remains a perplexing reality of our life in North America. The problem is of course racism. For that reason, some of the ringing affirmations of the Belhar are worth trumpeting to the world:

> **2. We believe** in one holy,
> universal Christian church, the
> communion of saints called
> from the entire human family.
> **We believe**
> – that Christ's work of
> reconciliation is made
> manifest in the church as the
> community of believers who
> have been reconciled with
> God and with one another
> (Eph. 2:11-22);

See **Belhar** *on page 11*

Shiao Chong

Church confessions are public corporate declarations before God and the world of what a church believes. Confessions speak in three directions simultaneously:

To *God* in gratitude for God's revelation in Scripture and in Christ;

To the *Church* itself in commitment to its beliefs and mission as God's people;

To the *world* in witness to what the Church believes.[1]

Confessions arise historically when churches feel the integrity of the gospel is at stake and there is an urgent need to affirm the faith. Such an occasion is called a "*status confessionis*" (in Latin). Such was the case in the 16th century when the Belgic Confession was written. Such was the case in the 20th century when the Confessing Church in Germany wrote the Barmen Declaration in 1934 in the midst of churches supporting Hitler's Nazi regime. Such was also the case in 1986 when the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa drafted the Belhar Confession in the midst of churches supporting apartheid.

Belhar beginnings

Apartheid was not only tolerated but also *justified theologically* for its existence by some Churches in South Africa. Hence, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church felt the gospel's integrity was at stake. In focusing on three major themes – unity, reconciliation and God's justice – the Belhar witnesses to the world that the gospel is not about division and prejudice but about reconciliation and justice. The Belhar reminds the church that the gospel commands us to commit to these three themes. The Belhar, however, never mentions apartheid by name because as a confession it seeks to tackle the doctrinal heresies behind apartheid rather than act as a political manifesto against a social policy. This is an important difference. The Belhar is not simply dealing with a social evil. It is dealing with the church's *distortion of the gospel* that makes the church support a social evil. This is why we don't write confessions dealing with any and every social evil, e.g. abortion, etc. We only write confessions when the gospel's integrity is theologically compromised and this often manifests itself in the church's involvement in a social evil. Such was the case in the 16th century Catholic Church's persecution of Reformed Christians, as it was in the 20th century German churches' sponsoring of Nazism. And such was also the case when the Reformed churches in South Africa theologically absolutized racial divisions.

The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) adopted a Contemporary Testimony called "Our World Belongs to God" in 1986. The Testimony arose out of the need to speak to "the secularization of modern life and culture" in North America.[2] What is the difference between a confession and a testimony? According to the committee that drafted the Testimony, "a testimony contains what a church finds essential to confess at this time. It is more temporary in aim than a confession, but it may, with time and continued use, gain the status of a creed."[3] From this statement, it seems that the Testimony aims to be *contemporary* while a confession aims to be *universal*.

Furthermore, the Testimony, to the best of my knowledge, did not arise from a *status confessionis*. It was not drafted in response to a situation where the church felt that the gospel was at stake. It was drafted to "address current needs and restate the one faith in contemporary language."[4] Hence, a main difference between the Belhar Confession and the Contemporary Testimony is that the Belhar aims to protect the gospel's *integrity* while the Testimony aims to apply the gospel's *relevance*.

These differences, of course, are not absolute. But the main consideration in adopting any confession – be it the Belhar or upgrading the Testimony – should be faithfulness to the gospel's integrity, not simply relevance to contemporary issues. The Belhar was intentionally drafted as a confession to protect the gospel's integrity against the doctrinal heresy of apartheid. If the CRC accepts the Belhar at less than full confessional status, e.g. as a testimony, are we then claiming that racial/ethnic unity and justice are less

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News

Belhar *continued from p.10*

– that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain (Eph. 4:1-16);

– that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted (John 17:20-23).

Furthermore, it is also important for the world to hear what the church repudiates:

Therefore, we reject any doctrine:

– which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;

– which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

The really attentive reader will notice that the "rejections of errors" after Article 2 in the Belhar has four points, while I list only two. That is because I consider the second and third to be unclear and therefore indefensible. That is why, "I can put up with it." To reject the Belhar altogether at this point would be for the CRC to send a message that it cannot send to the world: i.e, that we do not share the abhorrence of racism that characterizes the writers of the Belhar and those who have already made it their confession.

And so, I am left with an admittedly unsatisfactory solution: to tolerate the Belhar as a testimony that says some important things truly and boldly while not inspiring me as a whole.

Dr. John Bolt is a professor of systematic theology at Calvin Seminary.

integral to the gospel? (See Ephesians 2:11-18; Galatians 3:26-29)

Unity, reconciliation and justice

The Belhar's three themes of unity, reconciliation and justice are sadly muted in our three current confessions. If the CRC rejects the Belhar, what is it choosing to say to itself, to the world, and most importantly, to God? Are unity, reconciliation and justice not integral to the gospel? Are they not part of the church's mission before God and to the world? Are they not what the church should strive for? The CRC's Synod 2009 answered all these in the affirmative: *"Synod observes that the Belhar Confession truly expresses the biblical goals of unity, reconciliation, and justice; the church's commitment to these goals; and the fact that 'true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church' (The Belhar Confession, Article 2)." Hence, it proposed for "the adoption of the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession" to Synod 2012.*[5]

Practically though, what may be more important than a document's confessional *status* is its confessional *use*. Do we leave our confessions to gather dust on the theological shelf? How many CRC churches today study, engage, and apply in creative ways, our existing confessions? Ultimately, therefore, my personal hope is that churches and Christians engage, learn from and are changed by the Belhar Confession, along with, not in place of, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dordt, and yes, even the Contemporary Testimony (whether it gains confession status or not).

Shiao Chong is the Christian Reformed Campus Minister serving at York University in Toronto.

Endnotes:

1 Donald K. McKim, *Introducing the Reformed Faith* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) p. 4.

2 From *The Psalter Hymnal* (CRC Publications, 1987) p. 951.

3 From the Preface, *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* (CRC Publications, 1988) p. 1.

4 Ibid., p. 1.

5 Synodical statements from the CRCNA's website http://www.crcna.org/pages/belhar.cfm.

In India, deadly backlash against freedom of information activists

Daniel Pepper

NEW DELHI, India (CSM) – When Ajay Kumar asked New Delhi authorities last fall why a local politician had authorized the construction of private houses and shops on public land, he didn't imagine the question would land him in the hospital.

The activist had inquired using India's 2005 Right to Information (RTI) Act, which allows any citizen to ask for information from any level of government, from village leaders to the office of the prime minister. It presents a cultural sea change in India, where for more than 60 years state bureaucrats have acted more like colonial masters than servants of the people.

Kumar is optimistic that he will one day see justice, but critics say attacks like these are becoming increasingly common. In the past two months two respected information activists have been killed, and reports are emerging of many others who are threatened, bullied, and intimidated to silence their inquiries into government misconduct.

Right to information – on paper

With the RTI Act, failure to furnish applicants their information within 30 days can result in steep fines. This week one RTI applicant was awarded 100,000 rupees, or about $2,200, by the Central Information Commission in compensation for delays.

National Congress Party Sonia Gandhi and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh are at odds over the groundbreaking freedom of information act that many say is the first step to breaking down widespread corruption problems in India.

Mr. Kumar was stonewalled by the public information officer at the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, so he followed procedure and appealed to a higher-level public information office in the MCD. When he still heard nothing back, he went to the federal authorities, the Central Information Commission, which directed the MCD together with the police to jointly inspect the property.

But when Kumar arrived on site in January, he was attacked by a mob that backed the local politician.

"Neither the police nor the people helped me," says Kumar, who was beaten in the head repeatedly by an iron rod, leaving him unconscious and bleeding profusely. Kumar is now pursuing the matter in court.

Despite the attack, Kumar says, "RTI is the only tool that can bring an end to a corruption in India. Previously there was no point in asking [for information] because the applications were not replied to. At least now, since 2005, these public authorities are in some way compelled to answer queries of the public. It is a starting point."

At a meeting in the capital of the poverty-stricken northern Indian state of Bihar last November, 49 activists spoke about fighting trumped-up arrest warrants and other attempts to silence their efforts. None of the warrants have stood up under scrutiny, they claim. On Feb. 14 in Bihar, well-known RTI activist Shashidhar Mishra was shot dead by unidentified gunmen on motorcycles at the entrance of his home. He had been working to expose local welfare schemes.

A month before, in the tech hub of Pune, a couple hours outside Mumbai, another activist, Satish Shetty, was killed while on his morning walk. The High Court in Bombay asked the state government to investigate the killing.

The upswing of violence has dire implications to Shailesh Gandhi, a commissioner with the Central Information Commission, the country's highest authority for RTI applications.

"It tells me that the rule of law is almost absent. The truth is that powerful people feel there is no law," Mr. Gandhi says.

Painting the Psalms . . . an artistic devotional

an interview with Melani Pyke

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Melani Pyke is an artist on a mission. Starting on Nov. 15, 2009, Pyke, 29, has painted one psalm a day from the Book of Psalms and plans to continue doing so until she has completed all one hundred and fifty of them. The Crystal Beach, Ontario, resident and member of Calvary Church in St. Catharines has painted live at a wide variety of worship services. It was then that she noticed how people of all ages and backgrounds opened up to receive God's message through her paintings.

Pyke's passion has always been to use her artistic gifts to communicate God's Word. From 1999 to 2001, she completed Youth With a Mission's (YWAM) Discipleship Training School. This included a two-month outreach to the aboriginal people of Canada's west coast, and then the completion of YWAM's School of Illustration. Pyke graduated from Mohawk College's Graphic Design Production program in 2003.

Psalm 40 Out of the Mud

What inspired you to undertake this project?

Last year, when I was pregnant with our first child, I realized how my life was changing. We were planning on moving from an apartment to a house to make room for the baby, and ended up moving to a new town. I'm in a period of transition in my life, and this project has been a constant, like an anchor keeping me grounded.

Other female artists that I know have given up on their art either for good or at least for a few years while their children were young. I felt I had a limited time to do something unique or significant with my painting before I faced the possibility of putting art on the back burner for a while. While I was still pregnant, I searched other visual arts ministries and artists' blogs to see what's current, what's working, and what's not working for them.

I saw an abundance of daily devotionals in written form. Art is a kind of universal language, so, I thought, why not have a visual devotional? Christian art's historical purpose was to tell Bible stories to the illiterate. I'm applying that to our culture, which isn't illiterate but is often too distracted to read.

I've presented this series in the form of an email newsletter which interested people can subscribe to. This is a combination of ideas that I've mined and mulled over in the months preceding my start date. Why did I choose to paint the psalms? They are visual and emotional expressions to God and about God that people can relate to.

Throughout this project, my in-laws have been a huge encouragement to me. Both my husband's father and uncle are pastors. They have helped by giving me books and their expertise so that I can be sure I'm interpreting the psalms correctly before I send my paintings out for viewers to see.

Psalm 72 He will Rule.

Do you prepare yourself spiritually before you begin each day's painting?

There are so many distractions. So, I've established a daily routine to ensure that I have the quiet time I need in order to listen to God and to focus on completing the painting by the end of the day.

I typically read the day's psalm first thing in the morning. Sometimes a verse or a concept will jump out at me right away, and sometimes not. This gives me the whole day, during idle moments, to meditate on the psalm. I usually do the final painting in the quiet of the evening after my baby is in bed, the phone has stopped ringing, and chores have stopped nagging me to get at them.

What challenges are you facing?

One challenge is communicating to both believers and nonbelievers. This is why I provide a brief explanation along with each painting. I want the paintings to reveal God's love for people. However, many of the psalms describe the deep sorrows that mankind goes through, so it's hard not to get caught up in these darker emotions and give the wrong impression of what God is like.

What have you learned about God while working on this project? How has this project helped you to grow in faith?

Painting the psalms reminds me daily of God's characteristics. Also, I know he has enabled me to do this project, which is beyond what I could do in my own strength. He has given me renewed joy in using the gifts he's given me.

When I began the project, I thought it would be a challenge to maintain consistent, high-quality paintings that would each be completely different. I wondered if people would get tired of the e-mails and then unsubscribe. I worried that my ideas would dry up and the project would fizzle out. To create one hundred paintings in the same number of days seemed intimidating when I looked at it as a whole. But God wants us to take things one day at a time. He has given me the endurance to do it, and to do it well.

Psalm 68: Trust

Psalm 44 His Hand

How are you promoting your work?

I began by sending the daily paintings to about forty-five people in my own network of friends, family, past art buyers, and pastors who had invited me to paint "live" during worship services. I asked these subscribers to let others know about the project. As a result, the project has gained momentum. Now there are one hundred and twenty subscribers. If your readers are interested in viewing my work, having me paint live, or learning more about it, they can contact me at www.melpyke.com.

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema is a freelance writer living in St. Catharines, ON. She has recently published her first children's picture book, Monzi and Mama's Stories, *copies of which can be ordered at sonyavf55@hotmail.com.*

HE IS RISEN INDEED!

THE SACRIFICE

It is not easy to wait for an angel.

Abraham don't let that knife strike –
a new command is in sight,
the old way is now pallid
and we need a new reflection.

But it is not easy to wait for an angel.

Because stubborn even an ox
can seem quite solid
quite orthodox
always going in the same direction:

Not you, Abraham,
but perhaps some of us
can never turn aside
waiting for God to provide
and hear the lamb bleating.

Consider again the Lamb of God
hidden in the bushes
erasing the sin of the world
in the unheard of way called Lent.

Let us repent
for God is bent
on our benediction.

Obedience is better than sacrifice:
but none of ours suffice
to gain salvation.

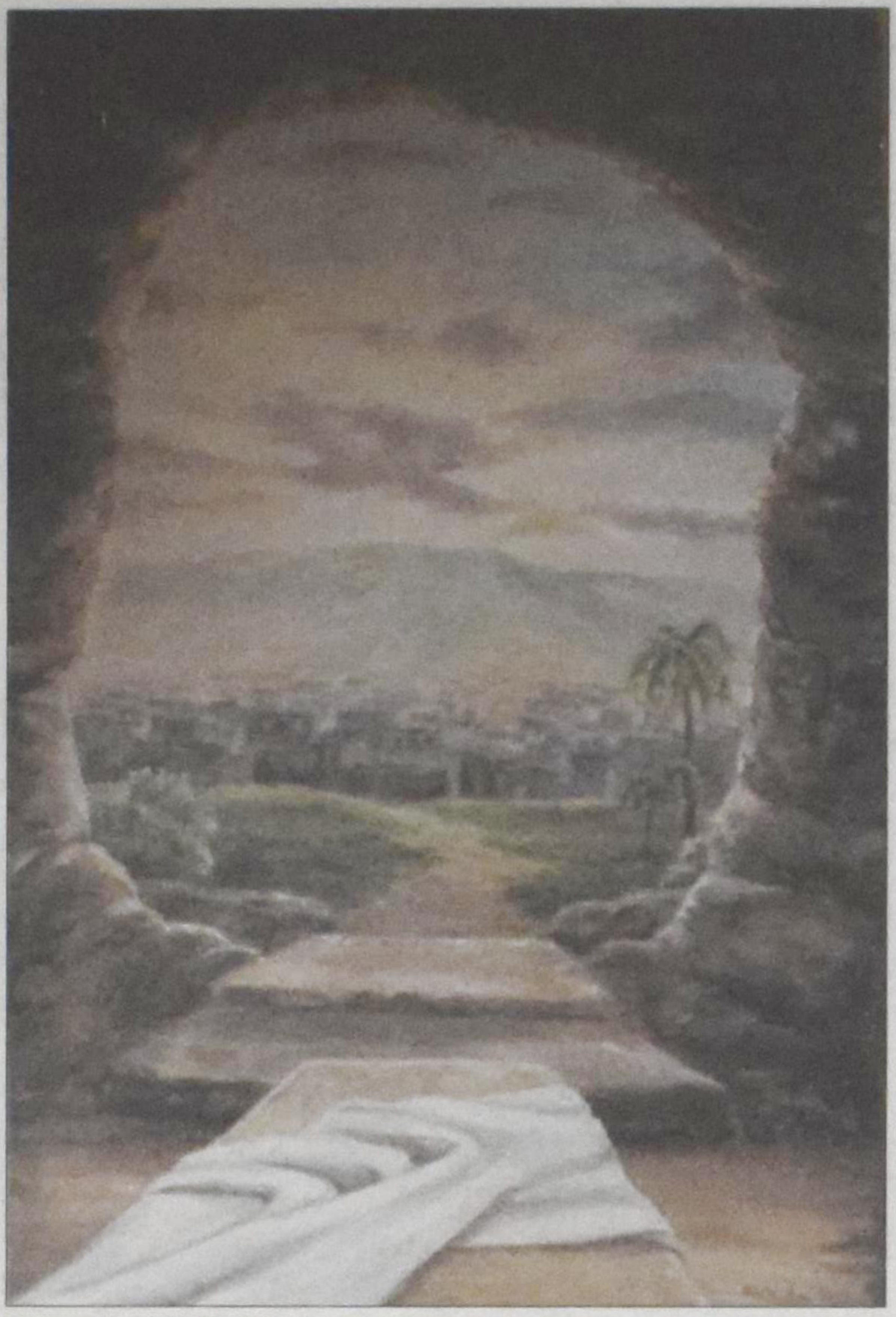
The way up the mountain is full of pain
yet for our gain.
The way down the mountain is full of joy:
even the donkey hurrahs, it seems.

Isaac the boy
has new dreams
and skips lightly.

Stars over the tent nightly
while the story about the Lamb of God
is heard around the fireside
and retold ever more brightly:
he carried our cross to the mountain.

I lift up my eyes
to this great surprise.

Frank Sawyer (sawyer@t-online.hu) was born in BC and studied at Calvin College and in the Netherlands where he became a pastor. Since 1982 he has served with Christian Reformed World Missions, first in Latin America and then in Hungary, where he teaches philosophy and ethics at Sarospatak Seminary.



Risen *by Melani Pyke*

So many souls will travel far

(feet blistering from the steady friction
of worn sandals and misplaced devotions,

with backs bent low by bags packed full

of rootless hopes and loves without beloveds.
"we know we are looking, we have always known that,"

they stop to rest, along the path.

"it's to find for what that we journey."
Moved by the emptiness of their eyes,

we slowly offer in reply,

"Peace – the old civitate Dei – is a city not bound to place,
and though change serves well to quicken pace,

your wand'rings only will increase.")

To find what was most immediate to us:
Michelangelo's hand of God curled carefully into a fist,

striking the wooden doors of hearts.

Toss and turn as we may, now on our back, now side, now belly –
our bed is hard at every point, for you alone are our rest. – Augustine

Nick Schuurman lives in Cambridge, Ontario, where he is finishing up a degree in Theology and Intercultural Studies. He reviews poetry for youngpoets.ca and can be found writing at nickschuurman.blogspot.com.

A Pennsylvania Dutch Easter

Susan Dewing

What was Easter in southern Pennsylvania without the ducklings and bunnies and chicks? They were sold from tables with chicken wire strung around them in every 5 and dime store: one for the baby rabbits, one for the ducklings, and a third for the fluffy chicks. Most of the area, however, called the baby chickens "peepees!" We children loved them all and spent lots of time petting and holding them whenever our parents shopped. Yep, there they were, right down the centre aisle of McCrory's. You could hear them peeping the minute you opened the door.

My brother was lucky enough to get a duckling one year, but he fell out of love with the fuzzy little guy when it grew up into a duck. But he was still very upset when Grandpa served his duck up for dinner the next Easter. His experience, of course, meant that I could never have one. As for me, my love was the peepees – especially the pink ones! Of course, the blue and green ones were nice, too. Yes, the chicks were (I found out as a teenager) coloured with food colouring. Could you imagine that today? Quick, call PETA! Sadly (but fortunately), I never owned one to see it grow out of its coloured childhood.

The great hunt!

We always had an egg hunt at our church. Everyone in the community came, with all their children and grandchildren. And no one came without dozens of coloured eggs – dozens and dozens! They were hand-coloured using Hinkle's egg kits: four little glass bottles of colouring with q-tips as brushes. Everyone loved colouring eggs – adults and children alike.

My mother also made onion-skin eggs. Mom saved the outer layers of onion skin before Easter and then boiled them to dip the hardboiled eggs in. They made glourious brown or copper eggs, each a different shade.

At the church's hunt, the eggs for the youngest children were just placed on the grass. We have a lot of onion grass, which grows in high tufts just perfect for leaning an egg against. We had a woods behind the church building and that was where the teenagers sought out their eggs: in trees and bushes, under moss and mushrooms. It was great fun. When we were older still, we had just as much hiding the eggs.

Mixed emotions

With all the happiness of the hunt, there also came sorrow. Everyone used real baskets, and often, when the little ones bent over to pick up an egg, the basket tipped, and all the eggs rolled out! As you know, the grass is always greener on the other side, so there were always contenders for the dumped eggs, leading to not only upset baskets, but upset children as well!

After the hunt, everyone showed their beautiful eggs. And then they were promptly confiscated. We had to give them all up to the ladies with the roasting pans. They stood at the four corners of the bandstand (every church had a bandstand for picnics), and we placed our eggs into their roasters. We all lined up (minus some crying children) and marched around the bandstand as each lady placed an egg in our basket as we passed. We circled until every egg was gone, all so that every child got an equal number. It didn't matter how much you loved the polka-dotted egg you had found – poof! it was gone. And you never saw it again (except maybe in Anita Detweiler's basket). All this fairness was hard to deal with!

But wait! Did I mention the prizes? Every age group had two prize eggs (it was only fair to have one for a boy and one for a girl) hidden in their section. Some kids only ran around looking for these special eggs; they were going to end up with the same amount of eggs at the end of the day, no matter what. Finding a prize egg proved quite a gold mine, because the prizes were out-of-this-world BIG! This caused even more tears.

In York County, PA, even the smallest children got a taste of the joy and grief of the Passion, though we never looked at it that way.

Susan Dewing (radewing@cableracer.com) was raised in Craley, PA and still covets those coloured chicks!

Columns

Words from Wild Horses
Kenny Warkentin

Reveal in order to heal

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. Romans 5:1-5

In response to a dear friend this week, I found myself again going to Romans 5 and reading again the words of Hope. So often we are stuck in our troubles and find we have no hope, we are lost in the images of despair and hopelessness. What struck me as I read these verses was the words "rejoice in our suffering." What does that mean exactly? Having suffered, do I really remember rejoicing? When I felt the lowest of low, was my first thought to rejoice?

When we are in pain, the last thing we want to do is rejoice. But the first step toward that joy is to be honest in our sufferings. This honesty means that we are open with our feelings, our hurt and our pain. And that honesty, and the knowledge that God is for us and suffers with us, brings us to perseverance, then to character and finally HOPE.

Finding perseverance

When I was training for the marathon, I suffered. Oh, did I suffer. I wanted to quit. I wanted to throw in the towel, but I pushed through. I had this goal, and I very badly wanted to achieve it. I was honest with my friends when I told them about my training and how hard it was for me and my wanting to quit. They urged me on, encouraging me to keep going and not to throw away all the work I had done to train. I began to listen to music as I ran. I began to enjoy the pain (crazy), and it brought about perseverance in the thought that I could do this. It then built up my character, and I knew that I felt good about myself. I then could hope that I could do it. HOPE!

I also remember suffering as I left the gay identity that I was so firmly attached to. I remember the days when images, thoughts, memories, smells and sights drew me to want to lay down all the hard work and just forget this perseverance thing. But I longed for God; I longed for something more than the hopelessness that I found in my gay identity. I talked about my pain, my suffering. I did not want to stay in that place, but I knew I needed to talk, to be honest and really feel the emotions that God was bringing to the surface in my life. The phrase "God reveals in order to heal" has become a phrase that I welcome: even though revelation will bring pain, I know that it is for my healing. The more I put a lid on the painful areas in my life that God wants to touch, the more I stay in prison to that pain.

False balms

God longs for us to give him the pain and the suffering that we are feeling. He longs for us to be honest with Him and with the body of Christ. How are we being honest? How are we doing with the painful places still lingering in our hearts? Do we believe God to be big enough for our pain, or is our pain too big for the Creator of the Universe? To the one who painfully sacrificed His only son for us?

Proverbs 10:3 says, "The Lord will not let the godly go hungry, but he refuses to satisfy the craving of the wicked." God will not leave us nor forsake us. He will not let our needs go unmet or our pain go unhealed. When we turn to other cravings to get our pain resolved rather than bringing them to God, it will not satisfy us. It may give us some temporary relief, but it will not satisfy us. Entertainment, drugs, alcohol, shopping, eating, not eating and relationships are a few examples of temporary coping mechanisms. They are not altogether wrong, but when we abuse them – or use them to cover up pain – they can be detrimental to our health in all areas of our life.

The Lord is longing for us to be honest with all that is within us. He longs for us to be built up and encouraged, to build perseverance and character and to hope. To hope that God is for us and not against us. That he can meet us where we are, that he can meet us in our suffering.

God graciously gave up his son to suffer, to know our suffering so that we can be honest with him, our healer.

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Who's asking the big questions?

This summer I agreed to teach a course answering the following question: "What does it mean to live a meaningful life?" In being asked to guide eager minds in such soul-searching, I immediately felt excited about the prospects of the semester: I had visions of myself standing before the class asking heart-probing questions, making life-changing statements, the papers on desks fluttering with the winds of inspiration, young faces looking up at me with all the energy and faith required to run out of the classroom as soon as the bell rang and promptly change the world. I watched the clip from *Dead Poets Society* and felt empowered to make Robin William's whispering "Carpe Diem" speech sound like a cheesy greeting card.

And then I got into the classroom and asked the questions about life and meaning and purpose and raised all sort of other exciting ideas . . . and was met with a lot of silence. I realize that it can be vulnerable to respond to these ideas in a class full of intimidating peers, but I also think teenagers often don't really want to think about the deeper questions in life. At least, at the surface they don't.

I think we all realize intrinsically that questions mean change, and most of us don't want to change. Most of us are comfortable with living life the way we have been, and we don't want to get moved around much.

The start of something big

I started thinking about some of the big questions that are asked throughout scripture and concluded that big questions are asked before significant transformations in individuals' lives, and God proceeds to use these transformed individuals to lead others towards transformation.

"What if they do not believe me or listen to me?" asks Moses before appearing before Pharaoh (Exodus 4:1). "If the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?" asks Gideon before leading the Israelites against the Midianites (Judges 6:13). "How will this be?" asks Mary at the annunciation (Luke 1:34). "What do you want with us?" asks the man possessed by demons before he is set free (Luke 4:34). "Who are you, Lord?" asks Saul, thrown to the ground on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:5).

But as I got to thinking about these questions, I realized that in each of the above conversations, God initiates the dialogue. He has appeared in some way to reveal himself to the people involved, to make clear his calling in their lives, to give them purpose and meaning beyond the ways they've been living.

And so where does that leave me while I'm trying to encourage a class of students to ask deeper questions about their lives? I can say humbly that I have been transformed by God's revealing himself in my own life and so believe I need to follow these biblical examples and lead others to transformation. But I also accept that, while I will continue to challenge their thinking, I'm relieved that I don't bear the responsibility to *make* them ask the questions. I pray and trust that God will use me in whatever ways he wants, but in the end they will not ask the deeper questions directly of God unless he initiates the dialogue. I cannot make them ask. Only he can.

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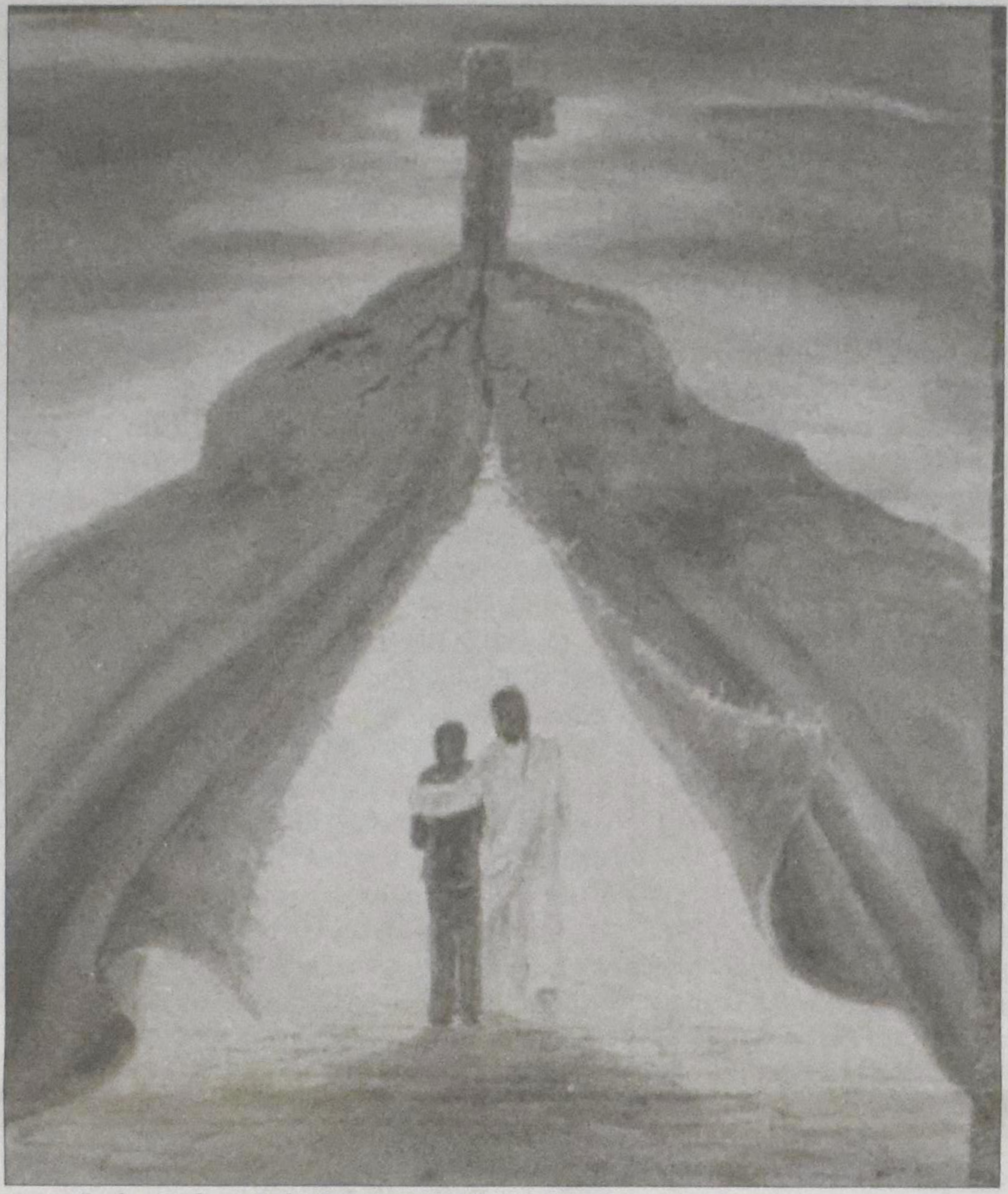
The mystery of change: parallel to the resurrection

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.
For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable and we will be changed.

I Cor. 15:51, 52



Enter In *by Melani Pyke (www.melpyke.com)*

It seems that, considering the first five words, Paul has a sense here of saying something very extraordinary. That is quite in keeping with the character of an apostle and his work. An apostle is someone who reveals hidden matters and mysteries, i.e. revealed mysteries, things that used to be hidden. Though from the beginning God had planned to do them, they were hidden in his heart. And he did them in our time, in our history. We are dealing here with historical facts, as God's acts and these acts find their focus in the coming, the person, the death and resurrection of Christ. An apostle is an ear- and eyewitness of that. It is for that reason that whatever the apostle says is in some sense a revelation of mysteries, of divine hidden things come to light in historical reality.

However, Paul uses the word *mystery* here in a special sense as well. For the apostle it is not enough simply to proclaim Christ, for in Christ are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Using Christ as his foundation, the apostle thinks about all questions of human life and world history. In that light of Christ all of reality is, in a sense, X-rayed.

The mysteries are multiple. Every time we hit upon other questions and knotty problems, complications in questions about our existence and in the process of world history. But out of Christ flow forth solutions to these problems, and new mysteries are revealed. With apostolic authority the apostle can then tell us these things. They were revealed to him, but not in some magical way. It was because he was entirely placed in the reality of Christ's revelation. From that reality he was enabled to think through all the mysteries of the world and our life in it. So here he shares them with the fellowship of believers.

The living and the dead

Thus, he is now confronted with the unique problem of what will happen at the re-appearance of Christ with those who are, at that moment, still alive. What will happen with the dead has already been made clear. They must be raised from the dead and must therefore rise and enter into eternal life, into God's glorious kingdom. That is precisely the power of Christ's resurrection. It was not for nothing nor only for himself that he was raised from the dead. God's act, in his Son's resurrection, was for the sake of his people, so that they, on the Last Day, would also be raised.

Of course, all that is now clear. The good news of Christ's resurrection actually makes it self-evident. If they were all dead at the moment of Christ's return, there would not be any problem. But that would not be the case. After all, the eschaton is a moment in *history*. It is the last moment, to be sure, but still happening in our human time. The world and life itself are still going on at that time. Even the Church is still there, and Christians are still there. They are not dead; they are still alive. What must happen to them then?

Now the apostle faces an interesting and important problem. But he is not fazed by it and does not shrink back. He thinks through the problem. Extrapolating from Christ and his resurrection, he says, "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed." This is the solution of the problem.

He is, of course, thinking about the difference between Christ and his followers. Christ is risen and glorified and shares in eternal life. He has that, and he is that. But Christians are not yet risen from the dead. They believe and profess, they love and hope, and thereby point at Christ. But they also struggle. All they do and are is done haltingly; they fall and get up again. Being a Christian is full of defects. It cannot simply stay that way. We must be changed and be made like his glorious body.

Thus, there is a parallel between the living and the dead. The living must be changed, and that is more or less like what must happen to the dead. They must be raised. The apostle emphasizes this parallel by saying that both things happen at the same time. There is absolute simultaneity between the raising of the dead and the changing of the living.

Both things will happen at the last trumpet. That is a beautiful and poetic picture. When the Lord returns, the trumpet will festively herald his coming. This will call his people together, from dispersion and from death, from all sorts of decay. At that moment, when the trumpet sounds, the dead will be raised imperishable and the living will be changed.

A twinkling and a mystery

However, the apostle does not just emphasize the simultaneity, but also the brevity: it happens in the twinkling of an eye. No doubt the apostle is alluding here to the divine act of creation that is necessary both for the raising of the dead and for the changing of the living. All God needs to do is to blink and this ultimate act of redemption will be done. But it has to be done, and what is needed for it to happen is the creational power of God. This changing of the living, as well, does not happen gradually from the inside, from the potential of the creature him or herself. No, it happens in a moment, from the outside, by the power of the Creator himself.

Yet there is a huge difference between the resurrection and the changing of those who live. The dead have died and are therefore totally enwrapped in death. They have discarded the body and must be clothed with a new one. All that will not happen to the living. Yes, they were in all kinds of ways surrounded and affected by death, but they were not totally in it and have not left their body behind. And they will not have to do that. Their body will not be discarded; it will only be changed.

This is a mystery, says the apostle. I would like to add that we can muse on this for a long time. It is a marvelous thought that for some the body does not have to be discarded but only changed for eternity! All of God's children alive today may well be able to keep their bodies. That is a sunny thought! Our bodies are that important! We are what we are: bodily beings (still) living in time!

Translated from the Dutch by Bram Hoff of St. Catharines, Ontario

Editor's Note: *This is the last installment of our Van Ruler series. Many thanks to Bram Hoff for his excellent translation. This feature will be replaced in future issues by a rotating sample of current Reformed thought. To get the complete series, email: admin@christiancouier.ca*

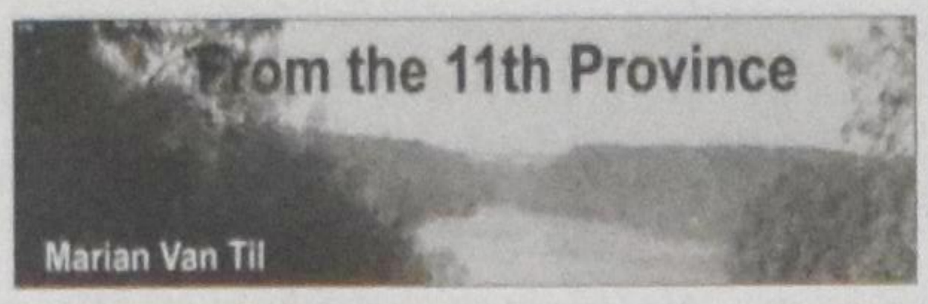
Easter Morning

Tomb, thou shalt not hold him longer:
Death is strong, but life is stronger;
Stronger than the dark, the light;
Stronger than the wrong, the right;
Faith and hope triumphant say,
"Christ will rise on Easter Day!

While the patient earth lies waking
Till the morning shall be breaking,
Shuddering 'neath the burden dread
Of her Master, cold and dead,
Hark! She hears the angel say,
"Christ will rise on Easter Day."

And when sunrise smites the mountains,
Pouring light from heavenly fountains,
Then the earth blooms out to greet
Once again the blessed feet;
And her countless voices say,
"Christ has risen on Easter Day!"

Phillip Brooks (1835-1893)



Resurrection, present-tense

"The Lord is risen. He is risen indeed! Alleluia!" That is the joyous exclamation with which millions of Christians around the world greet each other on Easter Sunday morning. Every Sunday is "Resurrection Day." But having just come through the five weeks of Lent which gave us the opportunity to particularly examine ourselves, to confess our sins and ponder in a special way the meaning of Christ's suffering and death for us, the reality of his resurrection – expressed in the elation of that acclamation – seems more palpable than it does on any other Sunday.

We know, of course, that Christ was born just *once* as a human being like us, he died "*once* for all" and he rose *once*. Nevertheless, we forgetful, easily sidetracked, fallen human beings need to acknowledge those real events again and again in order to keep our focus where it should be: forever and always on Christ our Savior and on the glory of God the Father, *our* Father. And we need to acknowledge that Jesus, now sitting at the right hand of God, is, still our Savior and still one of us (albeit with a perfected, glorified body). So we don't speak of the Resurrection in past tense. He *is* risen.

Jesus teaches us that Resurrection is always rightly spoken of in the present tense. There is the continued and continual life of the spirit: whether we live or die we are the Lord's, Paul reminds us. We here on this corrupted earth, still alive in fragile flesh and blood, are one, in Christ, with the myriad saints who are gathered around the throne praising him without ceasing. Among those saints are my parents, a brother and sister of mine, other relatives and many others I can name; you also have loved ones among those saints.

'Encourage each other with these words'

There is also the final resurrection – our astonishing bodily resurrection, like our Saviour's – on the Day when we all, believers and unbelievers, will be called from our graves to give account to him as the Judge of All the Earth. While we bow in awe before him, there's nothing frightening about that event for anyone who confesses his name. Paul tells us, "The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thess.4:16). He continues with this wonderful assurance: "After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever." Those two marvelous verses end by urging us, "Therefore encourage each other with these words."

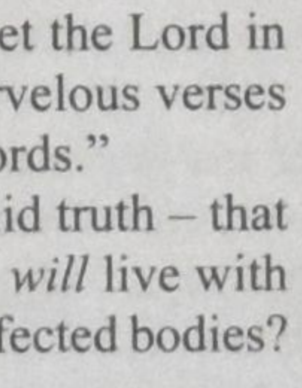
Do we "encourage each other" with the thought – the rock-solid truth – that our Lord *will* return, and *will* call us from the grave, and that we *will* live with him forever, not as spirits but in our own resurrected, glorified, perfected bodies? Perhaps we do; but I dare say we could do so more often.

The God of the living

In their gospels, both Mark and Luke record an incident involving the resurrection-denying Sadducees (who Jesus had previously called, to their faces, a "brood of vipers"). They came to Jesus with a trick question about a widow who married seven brothers successively. They thought they had him. Whose wife would she be in the Resurrection? they asked, no doubt with self-satisfied smirks of superiority. Of course their attempt to trip up Jesus failed miserably. Jesus gives them a surprising argument, using the Scriptures they purportedly loved so well. He tells them there will be no marriage in heaven; that we will, in that regard, be like the angels. But then he surprisingly adds this: "Now about the dead rising – have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!" (Mark 12:26-27).

There is no past tense for Abraham, Isaac or Jacob (or Moses). Though dead for centuries they are alive! And always will be. There is no past tense for anyone who has died or will die in Christ. For such there simply is no death. (In that light, Jesus' habit of referring to the dead as "asleep" makes perfect sense.)

And so we return to Christ's resurrection, which we will soon celebrate – again! – in our Easter services. The Lord *is* risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!



Marian Van Til is a former C.C. editor who lives in Youngstown, NY, with her husband and five cats. Her book about life with cats, Confessions of a Cataholic, *was released on Reformation Day. For a signed copy see < www.WordPowerPublishing.com> or write Marian at mvantil@roadrunner.com, or call 716-745-7073.*

Universal donor (A true story)

Cathy Smith

I gave blood this past Monday – my seventh donation. They love to see me come because I'm Type O-, the universal donor. Everyone can use my blood! My lifetime goal is to give blood 100 times. I started late, but if I stay healthy, it's do-able.

Giving blood is an emotional experience for me. I always wanted to be a blood donor, but a busy life got in the way. When I retired, I vowed to follow in my dad's footsteps and be a regular donor. I was about eight when he received his red and white lapel pin for ten donations. I was so proud. Decades later, when Dad needed a transfusion as a cancer patient, blood was there for him. I was so grateful. Now it's time to pay it forward.

Canadian Blood Services does a tremendous job of making blood donation feel like a significant civic contribution. Their commercials on television are very effective. Some clips spotlight individuals who have received blood transfusions. A smiling face turns directly to the camera to say a sincere "thank you." Another commercial focuses on an ordinary guy wearing a shirt with one sleeve cut off above the elbow. He says that as a kid he always wanted to be a hero, like Superman, and save lives. Then he smiles broadly and says, "Now, I just save lives.... I give blood."

The process

My blood donation took place, appropriately enough, at the New Life Pentecostal Church in Petrolia. When I registered in the gym, the receptionist welcomed me warmly, and booked my next two appointments. She thanked me for coming and directed me to the next station. A nurse verified my identification, pricked my finger, and tested my iron level. She gave me some literature and a questionnaire. She thanked me for my willingness to donate blood and sent me to a table to fill out my form.

The first time I filled out the questionnaire, it was rather daunting. Lots of questions about where I had travelled, whether I'd ever had any of several strange illnesses ending in "sis," and whether I had ever worked with monkeys. The little monkeys in my classroom didn't count. Because I've done this a few times now, I zipped through the paperwork.

Another nurse motioned me into a privacy booth, took my temperature and my blood pressure and asked me all the embarrassing sex questions. "Have you ever traded sex for drugs or money?" "Have you ever had sex with someone who has been in prison?" Now that I am an old hand at being a blood donor, in addition to just being old, I hardly even blush at the long list of sex questions. She thanked me for taking the time to give blood today, led me to my stretcher and instructed me to lie down.

A blonde middle-aged nurse with aqua eye shadow and pink lip gloss introduced herself. You notice these things when you are lying flat on your back and you can't see much else other than the ceiling. She thanked me for volunteering to give blood today. She complimented my earrings and praised my bravery as I watched her inject the needle in my arm.

My partner in plasma

When my super O- blood was flowing well, she turned her attention to the young man beside me. She thanked him for coming out to give blood and asked what he was going to do with the rest of the day. He said he was a part-time student at The University of Western Ontario and he had to write an essay comparing the welfare system in Canada and Kenya. This was interesting, so I listened in while staring at the rafters.

There was a brief silence as she poked him. He must have looked away because they shared a chuckle and he admitted, "I don't like needles much."

"I guess you don't have any tattoos, then?" she joked.

"Yeah, actually, I do," he said. "I have one on my back. My dad and I got them together. It's our family crest. It kinda hurt, but not too bad. At least it's not a stupid skull or something I'll be embarrassed about when I get older."

Our nurse got pretty excited about this. "Believe it or not, my mom got a tattoo for her birthday. She just turned 65! We didn't believe she would do it. She got a crown tattooed on her back because her nickname is Queen Irene. Now she goes to the seniors' dances with a dress cut low in the back, so the tattoo will show." They laughed. "I remember when she would say tattoos were for low-lifes, you know, like prisoners and sailors. Not for ordinary people like us! Now tattoos are fashionable, so she changed her mind! I'm thinking of getting one, too, just a little one, like a butterfly on my foot, or something."

"They're popular right now," agreed my neighbour. "All the basketball players and celebrities have them."

It didn't appear that I was going to learn any more about the welfare system in Canada or Kenya. When I had finished giving my pint, the nurse smoothed a band-aid on my arm, told me what to do if I started bleeding or feeling sick, thanked me again, and asked me to stop at the refreshment table. They want you to stay for a few minutes to make sure you are not feeling faint before you drive home. A cheery volunteer, wearing a red apron decorated with a flock of colourful service pins, thanked me for giving blood today and stamped my card with the date. She brought me a coffee and a Peek Frean shortbread cookie and called me "dear."

The power of (the) blood

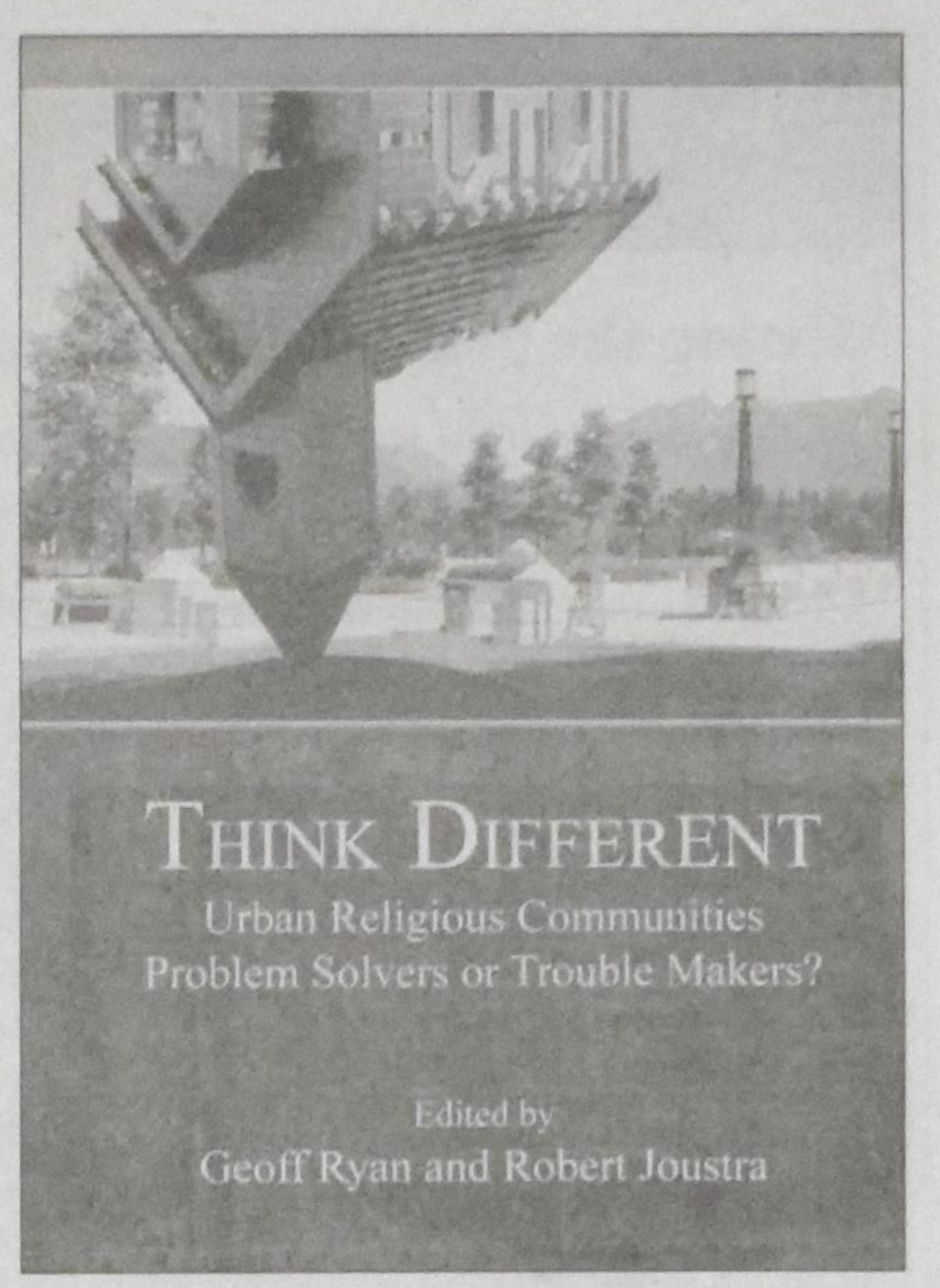
So you're probably wondering by now, And what is so emotional about all this?

Well, blood is a central symbol of my Chris-

Book Review

Directions to church:

On setting up shop and building community



Nicholas Ellens

As I read *Think Different: Urban Religious Communities: Problem Solvers or Trouble Makers?* (Geoff Ryan and Robert Joustra, ed.), Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words frequently came to mind: "The person who's in love with their vision of community will destroy community. But the person who loves the people around them will create community everywhere they go."

On the surface, it seems that the collection of articles contained in this book generally addresses systematic, macro-scale issues of community and urban citizenship, which runs contrary to Bonhoeffer's claim that vibrant, healthy community is a natural product of living in love. From a Reformed perspective, I tend to pay deference to systematic approaches to problems, and as such I find a good number of allies in this book: authors who offer a carefully executed, pre-determined plan to produce a certain urban society with a certain view of how community "ought" to function.

Looking at the book more deeply, however, reveals a common thread in most of the articles which reconciles beautifully with Bonhoeffer's thoughtful words. The book illustrates that the prevailing individualism of modernity systematically limits many forms of human flourishing, but by systematically creating space – physically and figuratively – citizens can interact in such a way that love can propagate and organic and normative community can blossom. Furthermore, if religious communities are to be urban problem solvers, their role involves challenging individualism and vocally promoting community. It seems that the primary message is that successful urban religious communities must approach cities from two directions: by specifically acting in love and by using all possible means to encourage the strengthening of community.

Two themes

Think Different includes an array of authors representing a wealth of experience thinking about and working in urban communities. One of the strengths of this collection is its reliance on narrated examples and thoughtful metaphors. For example, Dani Shaw tells her experience of Ottawa during the 2003 blackout as an uniform-wearing member of the Salvation Army: while the city experienced upheaval, she found herself thrust into service. She writes, "While the politicians were temporarily deaf…and the police struggled to bring order…, the Church was present in a single individual who was willing to listen to a street person whose life had just flashed before his eyes." She affirmed in this moment the importance of urban religious presence. More broadly, we have space to look at two themes common throughout the book.

First, the authors dismiss the idea that religious communities should stick to themselves and merely provide their members a service like a restaurant or fitness centre. They use both theological and historical evidence to bolster the argument that religion is public and that religious groups deserve a seat at the table in discussions of urban issues. Theologically, they emphasise that the practice of religion necessarily requires response, which, when faced with the problems found in urban settings, results in religious people working for the transformation of the city. Historically, many authors look to past examples when churches were cultural hubs (and hubs for cultural renewal) as well as powerful and effective advocates for social justice. In one essay, Joe Mihevc argues that because decades of church-city interactions have been dominated by development applications and parking disputes, churches have lost sight of their mission. The challenge, then, is for religious communities to re-claim their legitimate public roles, concerned for spiritual and physical well-being.

A second theme is the importance of place for religious communities. For one, several decry the "suburbanisation" of the church: separated from the urban core by physical distance and imposing parking lots that discourage interaction between the (typically commuting) church community and the local community of residents. Instead, they present the ideal urban church as inviting and pulsing with life, in and of an urban community, and active in all different facets of life. With this, the authors advance the idea that a religious community should appeal to people's aesthetic senses by contributing to the streetscape rather than detracting from it. They envision communities that transform a physical place so that it elicits awe in those who see it and functions as a catalyst for transformation in the surrounding community.

The authors of this book do not have all of the answers and at times disagree with each other. I do not believe that some of the authors fully appreciate the deep cultural currents of our age and, as such, provide solutions that lack depth and nuance. Nevertheless, I found the collection to be insightful and challenging, certainly a call for religious communities to seriously re-assess their place in the urban landscape.

Nicholas Ellens grew up in Hamilton, Ontario. He currently holds degrees in physics and Christian political philosophy and is just beginning a medical physics research position at a Toronto hospital. He cycles everywhere and thinks that churches need bike racks.

Universal Donor *continued*

tian faith. At the Lord's Table, we "eat his body, drink his blood" as one song puts it. Stated that baldly, it sounds barbaric, even to my ears. I can almost sympathize with the Romans for presuming that the early Christians were closet cannibals!

I grew up in the Christian Reformed Church, far from the dynamic stained glass pictorials of Roman Catholicism or the dramatic hyperbole of Southern fundamentalism. I never really gave this blood imagery much thought. I blithely sang the old favourites about Jesus who "interposed his precious blood," whose "blood can cleanse each spot," and who washed me "in the blood." Abstraction nicely sanitized the blood right out of my Christian life.

That all changed when I saw the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. This is not a movie review, so I won't launch into a critique on its merits as a film. What impacted me most powerfully, though, was the scene where Jesus was whipped. I didn't want to watch. But I had this spontaneous idea, rational or not, that if Jesus could endure a flogging for my sake, the least I could do was steel myself to witness what was done on my behalf, a kind of penance for so casually ignoring his physical agony throughout my years as a believer.

"By his stripes we are healed" has now been viscerally and forever clarified. The nail-studded "flagellum" scored horrific stripes on Jesus's writhing shoulders and back. As the lashes continued, the stripes devolved into a jagged grid, gaping darkly through the spurting blood. A crimson lava flowed down his trunk and legs. The blood pool left spreading in the courtyard at the end of the scene strained credulity. How could someone who had lost that much blood even survive long enough to be crucified? I didn't weep, like some audience members around me, but I was deeply affected.

Years ago I saved an article by a medical doctor detailing the trauma of a scourging. I went back to check the facts. His graphic description supports the movie's portrayal.

The heavy whip is brought down with full force again and again across Jesus' shoulders, back and legs. At first the heavy thongs cut through the skin only. Then, as the blows continue, they cut deeper into the subcutaneous tissues, producing first an oozing of blood from the capillaries and vein of the skin, and finally spurting arterial bleeding from vessels in the underlying muscles. The small balls of lead first produce large, deep bruises which are broken open by subsequent blows. Finally the skin of the back is hanging in long ribbons and the entire area is an unrecognizable mass of torn, bleeding tissue. (The Crucifixion of Christ from a Medical Point of View by C. Truman Davis, MD, M. S.)

Later, when the crown of thorns was pressed into Jesus' scalp by the jeering soldiers and the robe torn from his lacerated body, more blood flowed. Mel Gibson got one thing right. There was a river of blood.

That's why I get emotional when I give blood. I can no longer avert my eyes and pretend that it didn't cost Jesus all that much to save me. Every time I see that dark red blood slip through that skinny antiseptic tube – my own rich O- blood that everyone can use – I see the ultimate bloody sacrifice. I see Jesus. I see the materiality of sliced flesh and ripped sinew, a real physical body shuddering in paroxysms of pain. Blood spurting like a fountain, flowing like a river. Sufficient. For the needy in Canada and Kenya and for low-lifes like me.

I hope that my blood will help someone in a medical emergency. It does feel good, maybe even heroic, to think that my gift might save a life. I know my dad would be proud to be remembered in this way.

But there's another reason why it's good for me to donate blood. Because it's there, at New Life Pentecostal Church, that I am reminded about the only right response when someone gives blood. "Thank you." Over and over again. "Thank you for coming out to give blood today." "Thank you for your donation."

Dear Lord Christ, thank you. May the evidence of my gratitude be your name tattooed over every inch of my life and a multitude of service pins emblazoned on my days.

Cathy Smith is a freelance writer and retired teacher living in Wyoming, Ontario. She is a member of the Wyoming Christian Reformed Church. Visit her blog, Peripheral Vision, at http://cathysmith001.wordpress.com/ for further reflections on the Christian life, short stories, gardening articles and much more.

Getting Unstuck
Arlene Van Hove

Missing the grandchildren is not a crime

President Obama called his grandmother – and grandparents like her who raise their grandchildren – unsung heroes. I tend to agree. Raising grandchildren after having raised one's own children can be daunting. Yet, many grandparents do so without complaint. For most of us, however, being grandparents can be a wonderful stage in our lives. But this role can also have its challenges and sorrows.

Q. Our daughter and son-in-law are divorcing. They have three children: a daughter, 16, and two sons, 14 and 12. All of us live in the same town, so we have always had a casual and comfortable relationship with one another. We would see them at least once a week. We also celebrated birthdays and other special occasions together in our home. The last year has been difficult for our grandchildren. The atmosphere between their parents is very conflicted, and we have not been able to see our grandchildren much. Our daughter and son-in-law do not confide in us in terms of their relationship. We also have not prodded them for updates. The issue for us is that we want to continue our relationship with our grandchildren. I have raised the issue a few times with my daughter, but she is noncommittal. She tells me the children want to spend a lot of time with their friends. I understand – she could be wondering if we would be asking the children about what is going on at home, but that will not be the case. We simply miss them, and we would like them to feel our home is a stable place for them to be while they are going through this painful time. We are at a loss in terms of how to talk with both our daughter and son-in-law about our desire to regularly see our grandchildren.

A. For sure this is a painful time for you since you have no control over what happens in your daughter and son-in-law's home. What will hold you in good stead is the casual and comfortable relationship you have had with one another during the years as well as having celebrated special occasions together in your home.

My suggestion is to be clear with both your daughter and son-in-law. Let them know you love them and will continue to love them through this difficult time. Ask them to set a time you can speak with both of them about you seeing the grandchildren. Missing them is not a crime, so let them know you want to continue to see them and provide a friendly and supportive place for them as before. Also, ask them if they have any concerns about you being with their children. If so, do not be offended. Calmly tell them you simply want the grandchildren to be part of your life as before.

I do wish to stress, however, that it is quite normal for teenagers to want to spend more and more time with their friends. Consequently, I would also propose you show interest in other areas of your grandchildren's lives such as team sports or any other activity they may be involved in. Watching a volleyball or basketball tournament or attending a choir and band production can be a positive experience for you as well as your grandchildren.

Painful transitions are always difficult for families and extended family members. But over time you will be able to again carve out a routine with your grandchildren, built upon the foundation of the years you already shared. Good family memories can bring us together in ways we have not thought of before. But most of all, now is the time to show the grace of God to one another and pray for healing so that stability can again be part of your grandchildren's lives.

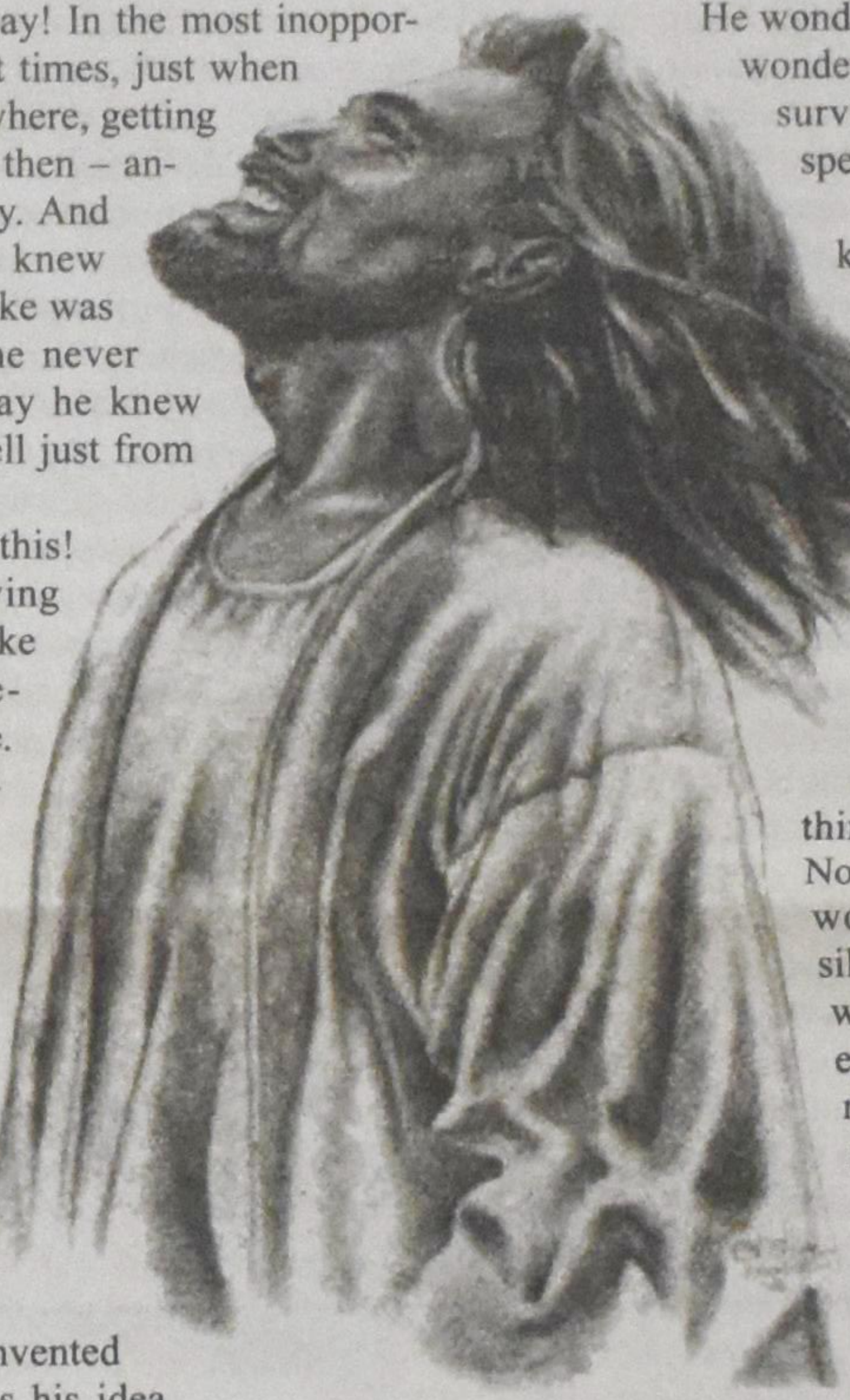
Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC.

WHEN HE PRAYED

Brett Alan Dewing

He never got used to that. The way this man prayed – the fierce familiarity he used, even in public. So that you felt both directly included and out of place at a family feast. Like all of them, everyone here in this room, was equal – all what he claimed – what he was – all sons of God.

He still felt blasphemous when he thought it. He still felt as if this Messiah message was a sham. The things that man would say! In the most inopportune places, at the worst times, just when they were getting somewhere, getting Pharisees to listen. And then – another brilliant blasphemy. And yet they were true. He knew it. Every word Jesus spoke was nothing but true. But he never fully felt it. Not the way he knew Jesus felt it. He could tell just from listening to him pray.



No one prayed like this! It was equal parts bowing and "oh, by the way." Like everything he did, Jesus prayed with courage. Even if that meant courage to be humble. He wasn't concerned with the way things had been done, only the way they should be done. Should according to some innate outward plan. It was crazy. Everything he did was crazy, even the simplest, sanest things. Because he did them as if he had invented them. As if praying was his idea, his mother-tongue.

And this is how it always went, wasn't it? He would catch himself staring, straying, thinking over it all while his Master prayed. While he opened himself – his relationship with God – to this scrutiny, he would hide his thoughts in his own head and think about how Jesus prayed. And worse, Jesus knew what he was thinking. He knew when his thoughts wandered. He knew of his uncertainties. It was ... it was the most comforting intrusion he could think of.

Suddenly, something Jesus said caught his full attention. "Glory has come to me through them." Glory had come to Jesus through them? If he hadn't known Jesus so well, he'd think that the man had misspoken. Certainly no glory had come to him through them. It was backwards. Jesus had filtered heaven's glory to them almost daily. He would miracle everywhere he went (what he did was less performing miracles than simply miracling). He spoke words that seemed to unlock whole synagogues in their hearts. And yet he was now saying that these men, these dusty twelve, had somehow brought glory to him? Now that was pure Jesus! Crazy and backward and somehow absolutely true. It hadn't always been easy to follow him – in fact, he was certain it had never been easy. And yet, every time he prayed, it seemed like their lives were the best there were.

He always got the sense that Jesus' prayers were… how to say it? They were altars, not monuments. The words of the Pharisees and Rabbis he had known would likely not be long remembered. And yet they spoke them as if they were new Pentateuchs. As if their prayers would stand forever as monuments to… to themselves. But Jesus. Jesus lit his prayers, and they burned up before them all. They were beautiful temporary things that made all the difference in everything.

He wondered how it was in private. He wondered if someone like him could survive the intimacy of this Son speaking privately to his Father.

He was aware enough to know that these were words of parting. That his Jesus was about to leave him. To become, he guessed, the world's Jesus. And they had all heard the rumours….

But, despite all it might mean, all it might accomplish in some crazy backward way, all he could think of was this man missing. Not the God, but the man. These words, so offensive and vital, silenced. These eyes, lifted now, with their light shut out. The elegant gangly line of his walk, the movements that could instantly make you alone together in a crowd of five thousand. The times he made you feel like a serpent with a move of his eyebrow.

It would be gone. He. He would. He would be gone.

Jesus's prayer was changing focus now. He had prayed for them, but now he was praying for everyone. Nothing was too big for him to bring up in prayer. He almost laughed out loud. Why not? Why not pray for every man who lived? Even more, why not pray, as Jesus did now, for every man or woman who would someday come to God. People as yet unborn.

When he looked at Jesus this way, he wasn't concerned in the least. This man, here or away, could look after one man if he could pray for thousands who didn't even breathe yet. This was the Messiah after all. He was. And everything was only beginning. Who knows, he might be present for a hundred more prayers just like this one. Jesus never meant exactly what he said. He was always halfway to the future when he talked. Maybe he wasn't going anywhere except across the Kidron Valley to the olive grove.

He smiled, and his up-curving lip met a downward tear.

He needed to pray. And he knew that he had been. That to meditate on this man was to pray. And he never got used to that.

Brett Alan Dewing is co-editor of Christian Courier.

CFGB feeds its gas tank and the world

Emily Wierenga

"So, what happens to the grain after you drop it off at the feed mill?" I asked Norman Dow, a farmer from Mitchell, Ont., at a recent Canadian Foodgrains Bank workshop.

Led by CFGB Policy Advisor Paul Hagerman, the workshop was one of many held this spring to educate Ontario farmers and CFGB donors about the promises and threats of biofuels.

Dow scratched the back of his neck. "I'm not sure," he said. "I know the money from the crops is credited to the Foodgrains Bank."

I raised my eyebrows. "So the corn you're growing to feed people overseas might inadvertently be feeding vehicles here in North America?"

Dow began to shake his head. "I'd never thought about it before. I guess it could be." Later, during the presentation, I asked Hagerman whether CFGB would consider using biofuels to transport its grains. He skirted around the issue for awhile then finally admitted they too were in the same situation as Meals on Wheels and other charitable organizations which could no longer compete with rising fuel prices.

I suddenly understood why he hadn't been too quick to jump on the back of biofuels throughout the workshop; after all, the Bank also requires an alternative fuel in order to afford the task of feeding the world.

"So the corn you're growing to feed people overseas might inadvertently be feeding vehicles here in North America?"

Local prosperity

Upon hearing Hagerman's admittance, sad realization settled upon the faces of the CFGB workshop attendees at Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Listowel, Ont.

Only a few hours earlier they'd been singing the praises of the government's 2002 plan to establish a biodiesel production target of 500 million litres per year by 2010. After all, this plan means prosperity for many Ontario farmers.

With 70 percent of Canada's 375 million bushels of corn grown in Ontario, the majority is sown in the southwestern part of the province. This spring 1.8 million acres of corn were planted; in June, prices soared to over eight dollars per bushel due to flooding in the US Midwest which destroyed up to two million hectares of corn fields. Huron County, one of Ontario's largest corn suppliers, was chosen as Commercial Alcohol's ideal location for its Hensall ethanol facility. The company envisions purchasing over 20 million bushels of corn each year, primarily from local farmers.

Yet the global impact of this newfound prosperity has been largely ignored. Hence, the rude awakening when Hagerman suggested corn being donated to feed the world was actually feeding vehicles.

Global crisis

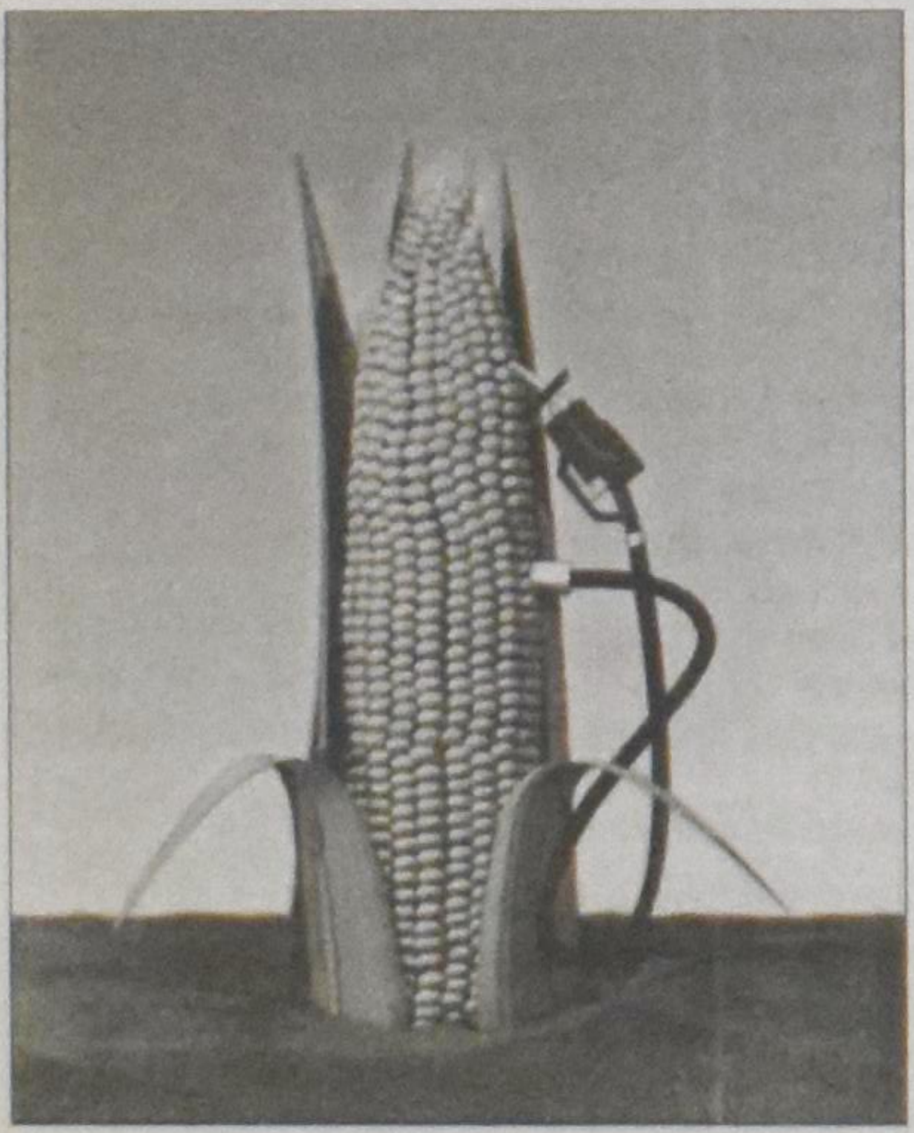
"Biofuels are green and renewable, which is positive, but they're using up food for hungry people which is negative," said Len Kraemer, a retired teacher from Walkerton, Ont.

A spring report by the Council of Foreign Relations revealed the average price of corn had increased by 60 percent, soybeans by 76 percent, wheat by 54 percent, and rice by 104 percent. Josette Sheeran, executive director of the World Food Program, has called it a global "tsunami of hunger." Robert Zoellick, president of the World Bank, estimates there are 100 million newly poor and hungry people as a result of rising food prices.

Up to 30 percent of North America's corn is feeding ethanol plants. According to Barbara Stocking of Oxfam, it takes the same amount of grain to fill an SUV with ethanol as it does to feed a person.

Yet it's not as simple as blaming biofuels for world hunger. With renewable fuel production still in its infancy, ethanol is only one of many contributing factors to rising food prices.

"The truth is that increases in food prices are rooted largely in increases in fuel prices," said Gordon Quaiattini, president of the Canadian Renewable Fuels Association. "The cost of oil keeps rising – it's up an astonishing 100 percent in the past year alone, increasing the cost of getting food from field to store to table. Increased demand in emerging economies such as China and India are impacting pricing for all commodities, and yet somehow biofuels are singled out."



A new kind of fuel

The key, said Hagerman, is to use biofuels which *don't* eat up the world's food supply.

The term biofuels itself describes fuels derived from biomass sources as varied as switchgrass, sweet potatoes, algae and sugarcane, among other feedstocks.

Ontario farmer Don Nott believes the answer lies ultimately in switchgrass, a warm season weed. Nott has converted his 12,000 acre cash crop operation into a fuel-production industry, turning fields of switchgrass into pellets of fuel.

Not only is switchgrass self-seeding, saving farmers time in re-planting; it can be grown in marginal land, sparing fields for food crops. Adaptable and versatile, switchgrass can thrive in many weather conditions, lengths of growing seasons, soil types and land conditions.

"We should be using cellulose instead of food for fuel," he said. "We need to save the good land for growing food and save the marginal land for growing switchgrass. It's one of the best ideas out there because it's quickly renewable; switchgrass is carbon neutral. It's a much faster turnaround and will have minimal impact on the food chain."

As for energy output versus input, there's no debate, said Nott. "The energy output is far greater. Corn requires planting, spraying, harvesting, trucking, drying and then transporting to an ethanol plant. With switchgrass, once it's planted it comes back for 20 to 30 years. You cut it in the fall and harvest it in the spring. That's it."

Roger Samson from McGill University's Resource Efficient Agriculture Production Canada believes pellets are a reasonable alternative fuel. Switchgrass, he said, is the centrepiece of an ethanol-from-fibre production system that would be more energy-efficient than ethanol from grain. It is able to supply the biomass required for production of up to 380 litres of ethanol per 1,000 kilograms. This gives switchgrass the potential to produce 3,800 litres of ethanol per acre, compared to 2,527 litres for sugarcane and 1,520 litres for corn.

This spring, 1,000 acres of switchgrass were planted near Guymon, Okla. in the Oklahoma Panhandle to study the feasibility of using the crop as a long-term fuel resource. The project is the largest of its kind, and is being spearheaded by the Oklahoma Bioenergy Centre.

"The more biofuels we produce and use, the more we will help farmers in both the developed and the developing world," said Quaiattini. "Sugar cane in Latin America and the Caribbean, and switchgrass and jatropha in Africa are untapped biofuel resources that could help the Third World grow out of poverty. We are talking about a progressive agriculture policy that will help governments reduce or eliminate subsidies by making agriculture a more economical and free-market undertaking."

Overall, biofuels which keep "the good farmland for growing the food humans need" as Nott put it, are a viable and necessary alternative in a world running low on oil.

"To use perfectly good food for human consumption, such as wheat and corn, in the inefficient process of ethanol energy production is not responsible stewardship," added Kraemer. "Grasses or cane alternatives are much more responsible with reference to the common good from an ethical perspective.

"Let us not waste God's gifts of creation by usurping the energy of food through inefficient and luxury driven motives at the expense of the hungry in our world."

Emily Wieringa (wierenga.emily@gmail.com) is an author, freelance journalist for publications such as Christian Week, Faith Today *and Focus on the Family, and an artist who lives in Blyth, Ontario.*

Classifieds

Anniversaries

Apeldoorn, the Netherlands ~ Harriston, Ont. Canada
April 6, 1955 ~ April 6, 2010

Joyful and with thankfulness to our Lord, we are pleased to announce the **55th Wedding Anniversary** of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents,

GEORGE AND ELEANOR MUNNIK

An **Open House** in their honor will be held on Saturday April 10 from 2-4 p.m. at the Christian Reformed Church in Palmerton (White's Road next to the Hospital).

You are invited by their children and grandchildren:
Irma and John Devries and family.
Freda and Len Schellingerhoudt and family
Eric and Cecilia Munnik
Roland and Holly Munnik and family
As expression of congratulations please consider a gift to Wycliffe Bible Translators (the Barnhoorns).

Home address: 5179 LINE 13 Minto Twp RR 4
Harriston ON N0G 1ZO
519-327-4677

Fruitland, 1960 March 18 Trenton, 2010

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. John 6:68

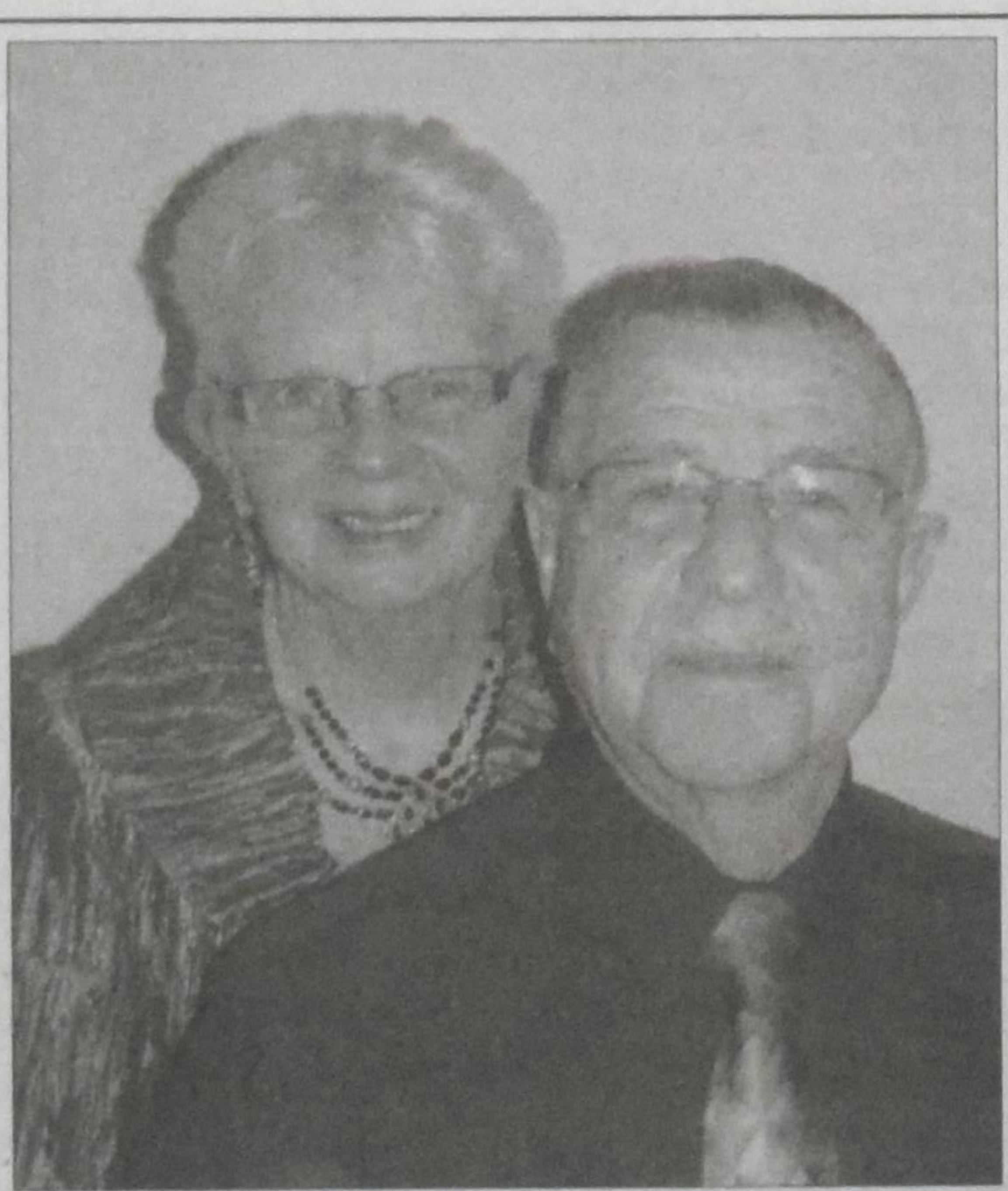
With joy and thankfulness to God, we celebrate the **50th Wedding Anniversary** of our parents and grandparents,

DICK AND FEMMY WIKKERINK (nee Otten)

We thank God for the blessing you are to all of us!

With love from your children and grandchildren,
Carolyn & Eric Groot-Nibbelink
Jenica, Michelle, Carissa
Ruth & Albert Doorn
Micah, Emma, Jacob
Richard & Susan Wikkerink
Kristin, Spencer, Selena
David & Melissa Wikkerink
Christian, Caitlin, Nathan
Glen & Carla Wikkerink
Micayla, Ezra

Home address: 169 Whisperwood Drive RR 4
Trenton ON K8V 5P7



With great joy and deep gratitude to God.

Pastor WALT AND LYDIA DE RUITER

will celebrate, with family, their **50th Wedding Anniversary**. Please join us on Saturday, April 10 at 2 p.m. for **Open House**, at Westmount CRC, 405 Drury Lane, Strathroy.

Forwarding address:
293.5 Carrie Street, Strathroy ON N7G 3C9

1950 **60th Wedding Anniversary** 2010
Holten, The Netherlands Bowmanville, Ontario

With thanksgiving to God for his goodness, we rejoice and praise God with our parents,

BERT AND RITA STAM (nee Hulsman)

celebrating 60 years of marriage on March 23, 2010.

With much love from your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren,
Joanne and Keith Oosthoek, *Kitchener, Ont.*
Tony and Vickie Stam, *Jarvis, Ont.*
Eric and Diane Stam, *Palmerston, Ont.*
Henry and Evelyn Stam, *Gadshill, Ont.*
Jane Roach, *Barrie Ont.*
Bert and Harriet Stam, *Simcoe, Ont.*
Jackie and Orwin Bandstra, *Newcastle, Ont.*
25 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren.

Best wishes may be sent to:
3634 Old Scugog Road, Bowmanville ON L1C 4J2
Phone: 905-623-1334

50th Anniversary Celebration

Alumni, supporters and friends of
Heritage Community Christian School
(formerly Athens Christian School)
are invited to celebrate our Heritage, Faith and Vision

Saturday, June 26, 2010
Open house 3-5 p.m. Dinner 5 p.m. Program 7 p.m.
Cost for dinner: $16 adults, $8 children.

Sunday, June 27, 2010
Worship Service and Strawberry Social 2:00

RSVP by May 12, 2010
Postdated cheques for the dinner made payable to H.C.C.S.
7463 County Road 28 RR 2
Addison ON K0E 1A0
Phone: 613-498-4176 Email: info@hccs.ca
Website: www.hccs.ca

The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.
Psalm 126:3

Obituaries

JANTJE VAN HUIZEN (Van Dijk)

Was taken to be with the Lord on January 13, 2010 at the age of 82.
Beloved wife of the late Wiebrand van Huizen who predeceased her on May 12, 2008.
Dear mother of: John & wife Beverley vanHuizen *of Essex*
Harvey vanHuizen *of Essex*
Hilda & husband John Olbach *of St.Marys*
Sadly missed by 12 grandchildren
She will also be missed by Jacqueline vanHuizen
Loving sister of Luuk Fritz and the late Trientje (1963) *all of Holland.*
Also survived by many nieces and nephews.

The Funeral Service was held on Saturday January 16, 2010 at the Essex Christian Reformed Church with Rev. Heslinga officiating. Interment followed at Rosehill Cemetery Amherstburg.

Correspondance: Hilda Olbach, 2839 Perth Road 130 RR 7
St. Marys ON N4X 1C9

"She who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty."

SANDRA (Saakje) TACOMA

passed away surrounded by her family at her home in Guelph on Tuesday, March 2, 2010 at the age of 79 years.

Beloved wife of the late Ted (Tjitte) Tacoma (1968)

She will be missed by her children:
Jack (Tet) *of Guelph*
Doug (Cory) *of Vernon, BC*
Bryan (Cathy) *of Brampton*
Alice (Michael) Veenema *of Fall River, NS*
Rik (Julie) *of Victoria, BC*
Patricia (Rick) *of Victoria, BC*
Valerie (Mark) Visscher *of Drayton.*
Her Siblings:
Dorothy (Peter) DeGraaf *of Goderich*
Peter (Sylvia) vanderLei *of Abbotsford, BC*
Diane (Henry) Teune *of Harriston*
Hilda (Jack) Seitz *of Elora*
Predeceased by Clarence (Margaret) vanderLei.
14 grandchildren and 3 great-grandchildren
And step-children and step-grandchildren.

July 28, 1929 February 13, 2010

JAN (John) TAMMING

Passed away peacefully, surrounded by family at University Hospital, London, Ontario

Beloved and devoted husband of Froukje Tine (Wigboldus)

Loving father and Opa to:
John and MaryAnn Tamming, *Strathroy, Ont.*
Ashley, Amber
Paul and Fran Maciejewski, *Strathroy, Ont.*
Nicole, Tina, Sarah
Albert and Grace Weesjes, *Aylmer, Ont.*
Danielle and Jordan, Nicole, Jolene, Michael, Andrea
Ralph Tamming, *Drumbo, Ont.*
Rachel, Trevor
Martin and Marie Tamming, *Ottawa, Ont.*
Hayden, Levi, Jesse
Ken and Clara Snedden, *Vernon, B.C.*
Mackenzie
Andrew and Ros Tamming, *Naas, Ireland*
Aidan
Predeceased by daughter Ekka Tamming in 1977

The funeral service was held on February 18, 2010 at Westmount Christian Reformed Church, Strathroy, Ontario

"Safe in the arms of Jesus, Safe on his gentle breast"

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or Helen Bezuyen 905-468-4334

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Suzie Leblanc soprano, Laura Pudwell mezzo, Michael Schada tenor, Russell Braun baritone.
contact: Linie Broer, broer@csolve.net

Dutch Language Easter Song Service

Welkom

Easter Sunday, April 4th @7:00 p.m.
Emmanuel Reformed Church,
170 Clarke St. **Woodstock**
with Rev. Henry DeBolster
Babysitting provided. Refreshments served after the service

Fundraiser

HANNAH HOUSE Spring Breakfast fundraiser
Friday, April 16, 2010, 7:00 – 8:30 a.m.
Club Italia, 2525 Montrose Road, **Niagara Falls**

To sponsor a table, or to reserve seats, please contact Rachel at **905.353.8552** or send an email to info@hannahhouse.ca You have a chance to win an overnight stay at a bed and breakfast!

Dutch Ancestry Conference

Canada's largest annual gathering of family historians to showcase Dutch ancestry wil be held **May 14-16** at the Doubletree by Hilton — **Toronto** Airport. Complete details of program, speakers and registration can be found on the conference website at *www.ogs.on.ca/conference2010*. Look for the link to the Dutch Ancestry Stream. For further information, contact the OGS Conference publicity coordinator, Paul Jones, at pauljones@rogers.com or 416-723-7226.

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FIRST CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH, located in Canada's first capital, Kingston, Ontario, is seeking a

Full-Time Youth Ministry Coordinator

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A complete job description and information about First CRC and the City of Kingston can be found on our website www.1stcrckingston.on.ca.
To inquire or apply contact
Alicia at **info@1stcrckingston.on.ca**,
fax to **613-542-7811**
or **mail** your cover letter and resume to
310 Kingscourt Ave
Kingston, ON K7K 4R3.

Applications must be submitted by April 20, 2010.

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Inquiries can be sent to:

Search Committee, Mountainview CRC
290 Main Street East
Grimsby ON L3M 1P8
or email searchcommittee@mountainviewcrc.org.

Further information can be obtained by visiting our website at www.mountainviewcrc.org or by contacting
Harry DeVries, chair of Search Committee,
at 905-945-1872 (evenings 7 p.m. – 10 p.m. EST).

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Mar 26 The Wookstock Dutch Theatre Group presents "Mister Doe-Het Zelf" at Great Lakes Christian College in **Beamsville** 8 p.m.

Apr 2 Grand Philharmonic Choir, Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, Howard Dyck, Conductor BACH Mass in B Minor: Good Friday, April 2, 2010, 7:30 p.m. Centre in the Square in **Kitchener.** Suzie Leblanc soprano, Laura Pudwell mezzo, Michael Schada tenor, Russell Braun baritone. Contact: Linie Broer, broer@csolve.net

Apr 4 Dutch Language Easter Song Service Easter Sunday @7:00 p.m. Emmanuel Reformed Church, 170 Clarke St. Woodstock with Rev. Henry DeBolster Babysitting provided. Refreshments served after the service.

Apr 9 The Wookstock Dutch Theatre Group presents "Mister Doe-Het Zelf" at the **London** Dutch Canadian Hall in **London.** See Feb 8 issue for details or call 519-283-6285

Apr 16 Hannah House breakfast fundraiser. See p. 21 for more details.

Apr 17 The Wookstock Dutch Theatre Group presents "Mister Doe-Het Zelf" at the Blyth Festival Theatre in **Blyth** 8 p.m. See Feb 8 issue for details or call 519-283-6285

May 5 Canada/Netherlands Friendship Day, **Burlington**. Doors open at 6 P.M. program starts at 7 pm. Free admission, for more info visit www.cnfa.ca or contact Jack van der Laan at 905 332 7000 or Hans Kloet at 905 336 7184.

May 14-16 Dutch ancestry conference. See p. 21 for more details.

June 26, 27 Come celebrate the 50th anniversary of HCCS (formerly Athens Christian School). Contact www.hccs.ca or 613 498 4176.

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Odds and Trends

Atheist pastor keeps his post

According to a report in a recent Beeld, a South African newspaper, an atheist pastor in the newly formed Protestant Church of the Netherlands may stay in office. He uses his pulpit to proclaim that God does not exist but that he is a happening or a word between people. The Protestant Church is a merger of three denominations: two Reformed denominations, and the Lutheran Church.

Two years ago, the Rev. Klaas Hendriks wrote *Geloven in een God dat niet bestaat* (Believing in a God that does not exist), a book which caused much unrest among members of the Protestant Church. Yet the council of Hendrik's church in Zierikzee has decided that Hendrik's teachings do not attack the foundation of the church. Although Classis Zeeland, to which Hendrik's church belongs, is known as a conservative classis, it confirmed the council's findings.

Hendriks himself thinks that if he is right, then there is something wrong with the foundational teachings of the Protestant Church. In his mind, therefore, his thinking is an attack on the foundation of the church. But he is happy with the outcome because it allows him to continue his ministry. He is a supporter of the liberation theology and looks upon religion as a way of helping people.

– Bert Witvoet

Scottish pensioner leaves fortune to Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is renowned for helping people, sometimes when they are in desperate need. But in its own hour of need, a Salvation Army branch in a small Scottish town got a pleasant shock after it received a donation of 850,000 British pounds (US $1.3 million) from a pensioner who had benefited from the Christian organization's welfare services.

When 90-year-old Robert Saddler, a retired Edinburgh architect, died in 2009, he left the Salvation Army a small fortune in his will. Major Jim McCluskey, team leader of the army's Angus county's community service, said "We have been thrown a lifeline with this legacy. We were down to our last penny. It is truly God sent."

Over the last few years, Saddler, who lived on his own, received regular domestic help (such as shopping assistance) from a Salvation Army team of trained helpers.

The Salvation Army is an international Christian evangelical movement that operates in 118 countries. In 1865, William and Catherine Booth began the organization in London's East End, an area of the city where many poor people were living.

The Salvation Army's North Scotland Divisional Commander, Major Martin Hill, said, "Many people will benefit from Mr Saddler's kindness. We will now be able to look at various needs of older people in the [surrounding] area."

– Trevor Grundy for ENI

Poetry

Editorial caveat:

Christian poetry may be as hard to define as Christian fiction, particularly when shelves are crowded with more disheartening examples than helpful ones. But here's one attempt: I believe that a good poem should make us see something in a new way. The following poem does that for me. Just as so many Christians have thanked Eugene Peterson for breathing fresh life into familiar phrases in The Message, this poem turns well-known scenes inside-out. It sharpens my awareness of Christ's humanity, even the untidy moments. Life is untidy, as the poet — Jessica Groen — explains.

"Before I became a mother, I heard several women recount their birth stories with bodily emissions and functions described in full detail, and I silently protested: "TMI! Too Much Information!" Then I gave birth to a child, and learned that when new life breaks through, height/weight data is not enough."

This might be a hard poem to read, because it describes the parts of life we do our best to ignore. Feel free to close the paper before finishing. But if you take the chance of looking at Christ's life in a new way, you might find yourself thanking God in a new way too, for having so fully joined his untidy, glorious creation.

---Angela Reitsma Bick

A Banner Year *was created by liturgical artist Nancy Chinn. (L to R) Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent. These banners hang in Washington National Cathedral.*

Gift Wrap

I. Nativity

They brought royal gifts, myrrh, incense, and gold, when they visited
And oh in such beautiful wrap
Many yards of finely-twisted linen
I would have swaddled you, my king-son, in this linen at your arrival
But at your birth we were trespassers in a pole-barn
I was squatting on hay
Clinging to the rope for support
Resting against a wooden beam between contractions
I pooped in a stall but the donkeys didn't seem offended
I puked in a manger but the pigs were intrigued
My bag of waters broke open with a gush and spurt
Then I entered the earthy, birth-y power of expulsion, with noisy grunts and grimaces
Joseph laid fresh straw and sat under me to catch my wriggly firstborn son
As you dropped out of your womb of forty weeks
Jesus, Saviour of the World! just as the angel announced.
You gasped your first breaths,
Howled hello,
Sucked sweet drops of milk from my breast.
Joseph rummaged and found my bag of cloth strips
(They were clean but discoloured by several menstrual cycles)
He used one to wrap the placenta
One to absorb my flow of blood and clots
One to blot the blood and mucus from your face and hair
One to soak up the slop in the manger
The others to swaddle his sort-of son
I would have wrapped you in finely-twisted linen, gift to the world that you are
But those visitors from the East came months too late
So I'll save this linen for your someday wife
Such fine swaddling for children of your own.

"From Mourning to Morning" *by Dorothy R.Gager. Her series of six sculptures can be viewed at ecva.org.*

II. Burial

At your death those Roman trespassers slung you up on a beam of wood
Used rope for extra support
I squatted in the hay beneath your feet
As you named John my sort-of son
You sucked sour drops of wine from a sponge,
Howled for your Father,
Then gasped your last breaths.
These linen strips are going to wrap my king-son after all
Born-again Nicodemus takes them gently from me
He uses one to wipe the urine and excrement from your legs
One to mop the mucus and blood from your face and hair
One to swab the shredded skin on your back
One to bind up the intestines ballooning from the hole in your side
The others to swaddle his sort-of father.
The time has come to use the finely-twisted linen and myrrh
No hope now of meeting a wife or firstborn son of yours.

III. Resurrection

They have come to mask the stench of decaying flesh and feasting maggots
These weeping women carrying spices on a Sunday morning
But they are hours too late
Though my name is Tomb
I too now have an earthy, birth-y power of expulsion
Didn't you feel the quake of my grunts and grimaces?
Even the hired watch could not catch my wriggly firstborn son
As he dropped out of his womb of forty hours
Jesus, First-fruits of the Dead! just as the angel announced.
Welcome women, with your gifts of incense
You are too late for burial rites
But just in time to celebrate a raising.
Come and collect these strips of finely-twisted linen
Blood-stained though they are
This gift-wrap shall be used again:
Resurrection clothing for all God's children
Who are sown in me
And most certainly shall (thanks to their sort-of brother)
Be raised imperishable.

Jessica Groen keeps house in Hammond, Indiana. She and her husband have a son, and have been sort-of parents to three foster children.